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12 June 2003
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PRIVATE EYE

INSIDE FREE EYE POSTER

GISCARD'S SHOCK MOVE

ROYAL OPERA HOUSE
COVENT GARDEN

THE ROYAL OPERA | 3 | 7 | 11 | 17 | 20 | 24 June at 6pm | **RICHARD WAGNER**

LOHENGRIN

Conducted by **Mark Elder** and directed by **Elijah Moshinsky** with **Robert Dean Smith**, **Melanie Diener**, **Waltraud Meier**, **Sergei Leiferkus**, **René Pape** and **Roman Trekel/Quentin Hayes** [20 | 24 June]

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ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

ROLLING PRIVATE EYE 24 PAGE NEWS

LABOUR's general-secretary David Triesman is making his mark as the party's chief inquisitor. As members wobbled over their support for the war in Iraq, he not only suspended the member for Baghdad Central, George Galloway, but wrote to members threatening to quit himself in defence of the party he "loved" and had been a member of "all his adult life", etc, etc.

Oddly, his round robin neglected to mention that he had once left the Labour party for the best part of a decade to join the Labour-hating, pro-Stalinist Communist party.

Indeed, Tries-person's own militant activities as a student in 1969, and his involvement in a demo at Essex University, were even denounced by the then president of the National Union of Students, one Jack Straw. Straw said: "It is a sad day when a small sectarian group whose members cannot be bothered to present their own ideas, stop others from doing so." How very true!

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ABC

FIREFIGHTERS returning from active service in the Gulf conflict are due to have their jobs transferred into the private sector.

The ministry of defence invited firms to tender to run the Defence Fire Service (DFS) and has had applications from three consortia, including the Serco-led Logicair.

DFS is a skilled civilian force of around 1,000 firefighters supporting the armed services at bases and during deployment. Thirty DFS members are returning from the Gulf this week after dealing with oil-filled trenches and serious fires in Umm Qasr.

Neither the firefighters nor their union (DFS members are represented by the T&G rather than the Fire Brigades Union) are particularly happy with the plans, which threaten their long-term job security. They also see the timing as a poor reward for service in Iraq. As firefighter Darren Gribben said: "We are happy to serve the MoD overseas, but would not risk our lives for a profit-making company." A decision on who wins the tendering process is due in autumn.

Number crunching

£29,000

- cost of vaccinating 3000 third world children against killer diseases
- amount spent by Department for International Development to remove references to Clare Short from their annual report

WHILE the United States insists that Iran is harbouring weapons of mass destruction and Al Qaeda bosses, the British government takes a different view.

The export credit guarantee department (ECGD) has sent staff to Iran on a trade visit. ECGD official John Weiss announced that the ECGD is "keen to see UK exporters tap into" lucrative Iranian markets for oil, gas, transport, power, water and telecommunications.

Meanwhile foreign office minister Mike O'Brien has told MPs he is licensing night vision goggles for export to Iran. He said was confident that, though the magic glasses were "of military specification", they were "for use on the Iran/Afghanistan border against heroin smugglers, and the export is funded by the UN Drugs Control Programme". O'Brien says there is "no risk of these goods being diverted for use by the Iranian military". So that's all right, then.

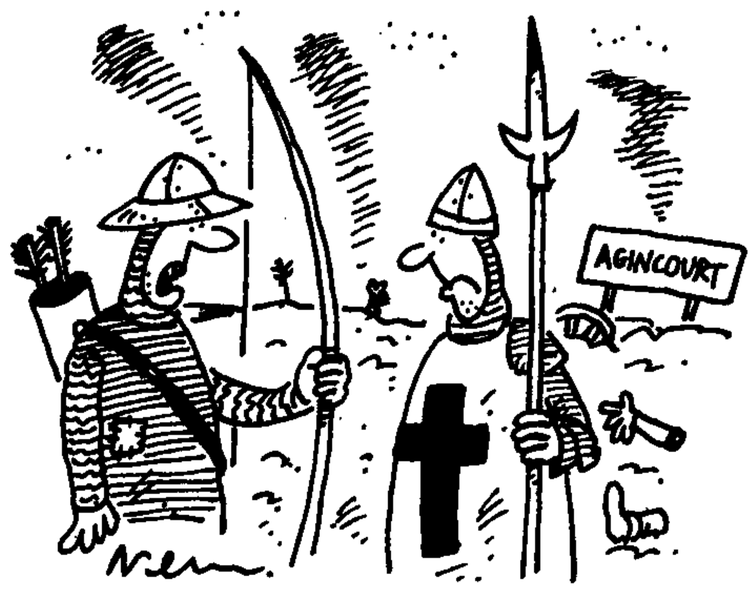
MORE sorry tales of exasperated clients and overworked staff reach the *Eye* as the tax credits fiasco at the Inland Revenue continues.

One father of two has been trying – and failing – for the past week to correct the IR's assertion that he is only entitled to £500 a year when it should be £4,000. Like other anxious claimants facing big cuts in benefits, he has been ringing the help line, only to hear the usual: "We are experiencing a high number of calls, please ring later."

On one attempt, and after holding for 45 minutes, he was eventually put through to an Inland Revenue worker. But he was told: "Sorry. Our system is down and I cannot access your details. Please try later." (When he did, the line was busy.)

Hence, he has been joining the queues of people trying to collect emergency giros and correct mistakes at local revenue and job centre offices, where staff can often only view a client's computerised file but not correct errors.

The case of west London mother and journalist Julia Bell is simply bizarre, meanwhile. She suddenly found she was not entitled to any child tax credit at all because the Inland Revenue had assessed her as being a billionaire (her salary, repeated several times). She tells the *Eye*: "I am not an international business person, so that sort of figure remains firmly beyond my wildest dreams. Unfortunately a satisfactory solution to the problem also remains beyond my dreams."



"Henry V's been investigated for war crimes"

JUST FANCY THAT!

SHARP-EYED reader Brian Hubbard submits an amusing footnote to last week's pisspoor Channel 4 documentary, *Mary Archer: My Life With Jeffrey*.

Unable to contribute an interview due to his imprisonment, Lord Archole instead submitted a letter in which he praised his wife and misquoted a line – "I simply adore her" – from the Sinatra ditty, *Call Me Irresponsible*.

The whole first verse would have been even more fitting:

Call me irresponsible
Call me unreliable
Throw in undependable too
Do my foolish alibis bore you [sic!]
Well I'm not too clever
I just adore you.

Mr Toad must be contrite after all.

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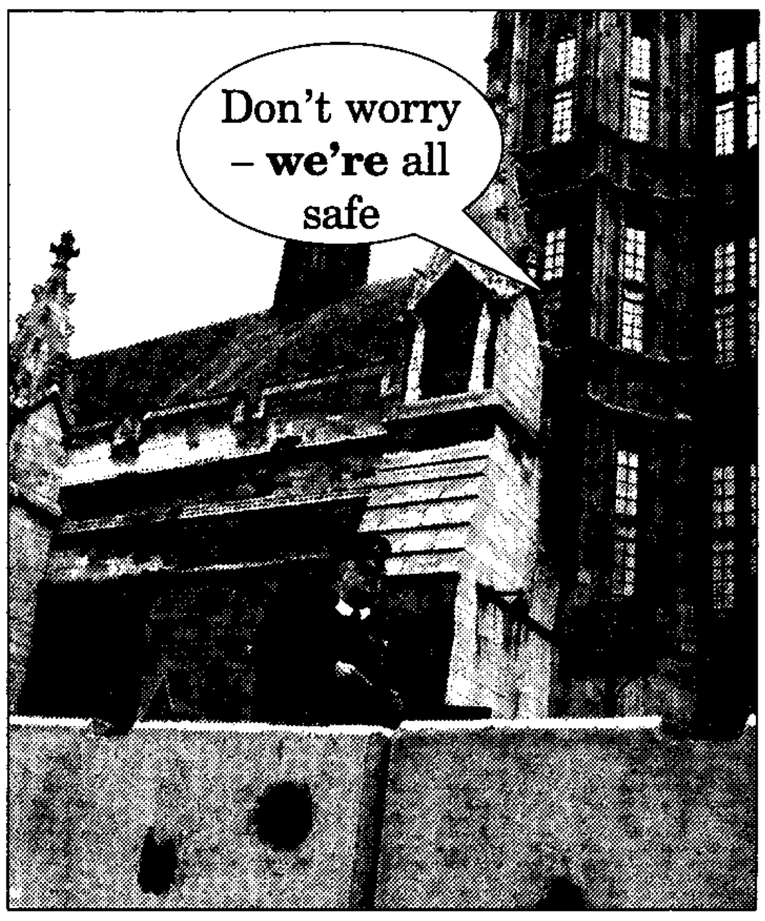
MPs IN TERROR ALERT



NEWS

CHARITIES face a high price for defeating the home office in the courts – especially when the government then delays paying costs that represent a high proportion of a charity's fund-raising income.

Last November the Howard League for Penal Reform won a case against the home office when it challenged the government's claim that the children act did not apply to under-18s in prison.

At the time Mr Justice Munby said the league had "performed a most useful service in bringing to the public attention a matter which... ought to shock the conscience of every citizen." Munby awarded half-costs of £60,000 to be paid to the charity – rather a relief since £60,000 represents around 10 percent of its annual turnover.

Last week, six months after its victory, the Howard League still hadn't seen a penny of the cash, despite calling to ask for it almost every day. The *Eye* then called the home office to see what the delay was. After apparently hunting high and low for an official who could explain the failure to pay up, a spokesperson rang back. "An interim payment is being made on the advice of the treasury solicitor," he said. Within minutes, the league had also had a call from the home office to say at least some of the money was on its way.

THOUGH this is the best time of year for promotions to the top echelons of the Metropolitan police, the assessors have not been very happy with the standards of senior officers.

This is especially sad as there are hundreds of vacancies for the top job of superintendent, and all the posts have not been filled. The Met will thus make more selections in the autumn.

Still, some interesting inspectors did manage to make it through to superintendent. They included Inspector Susan Hill, who was in charge of the controversial Ricky Reel case, first exposed in *Eye* 951 (she became ill after being criticised by the coroner); and Inspector Maxine de Brunner, who masterminded the not entirely successful case against former royal butler Paul Burrell.

MORE on David Mills, husband of "new" Labour culture secretary Tessa Jowell.

Mills' Persian connections go back even further than his attempt, revealed in the *Observer*, to set up a deal to sell British planes to "axis of evil" member Iran.

In the 1990s he was a business associate of Iranian-born British tax consultant Alireza Sarikhani, who went on to donate £10,000 to the Labour Party in 2001. Sarikhani joined Mills as a joint director of CMM Corporate Services, which handled the complex network of offshore companies for the Italian media baron and prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, which are now at the centre of Italy's corruption investigation into Berlusconi and now Mills himself.

In 1994 CMM was sold to Edsaco, another financial consultancy network of which Sarikhani was a senior director and of which he was to become chief executive. Edsaco ran into a little local difficulty in California last year when a civil court jury awarded record-breaking punitive damages of $170m against it for international fraud and conspiracy.

A spokesman for Sarikhani said that though he was the CEO of Edsaco, he had not been involved in the day-to-day operations of the group and had had no involvement with Edsaco post 1997. He was not personally a party to the claim against Edsaco and had had no contact with Mills since 1997.

Street Of Shame

THE opening day of the Chelsea Flower Show gave hacks the chance to sneer at the number of celebs lined up as PR fodder on various corporate stands.

"More celebrities than gardeners at Chelsea show," said the *Evening Standard*'s headline. Beneath it, Valentine Low put Liz Hurley at the head of a list of celebs attending the show. *Daily Moron* columnist Brian Reade tastefully suggested that Hurley and other "free-loading upper crust tw*ts (insert preferred vowel)" could have made a suitable target for a suicide bomber. And the *Independent*'s chief reporter Terry Kirby, no less, apparently spotted Liz Hurley "at the Raffles Thatched Garden Buildings stand" with her pals the Duke and Duchess of Rutland.

According to the *Daily Hurleygraph*, however, Liz was hundreds of miles away in Cannes that day. As indeed she was, not having bothered to turn up at Chelsea. The nearest she got to the show was the photocall list circulated in advance to hacks, who duly reported her presence anyway.

***MIRROR* editor Piers Morgan is a man who has had more conversions than the average loft apartment block. His latest extended mea culpa has been on BBC1 in the series *Tabloid Tales*, in which he interviews such blameless figures as Heather Mills and Peter Mandelson about how beastly newspapers like the *Mirror* have been to them.**

One of the new chums he made during the series is Jade Goody, a contestant in last year's *Big Brother* series who was vilified for weeks as a "pig" and "halfwit" by the *Mirror*'s "Official Anti-Big Brother Correspondent", Kevin O'Sullivan.

At the time Piers attributed his Pauline conversion to hard news values to the *Big Brother*: "I remember sitting in my office one night watching this garbage and thinking: 'has it really come to this?'" This year, however, *Big Brother* is getting a rather easier ride in the *Mirror*. O'Sullivan is still there, bashing out his rent-a-rants, but they are countered by a fawning commentary by "Ms Showbiz" Fiona Cummins.

A significant chunk of the *Mirror*'s front page was devoted to the show for the first three days of its run, despite the fact that nothing much has happened so far. And the "Anti" stance has been buried in the same shallow grave as Jon Pilger – the paper is now proudly billed as "THE UNOFFICIAL BIG BROTHER PAPER".

The change of mood came as no surprise to *Big Brother* producer Peter Bazalgette, who has been privately confident that the new series would get positive coverage from the *Daily Moron*. Could this perhaps have anything to do with the fact that Endemol UK, the production company Bazalgette heads and which made its fortune with the *Big Brother* format, also owns a 100 percent share of Brighter Pictures, the company which made Piers a TV star in his very own *Tabloid Tales*?

"They've been feeding him growth drugs"

Number crunchings

£700,000

■ amount Ulrika Jonsson got to detail her sex-life in the Mail

£550,000

■ amount John Leslie got to deny her allegations in the Express

FRIDAY 23rd MAY - Annual Sale of WORKING SHEEPDOGS (cat. available)

Craven Herald

ANDREW "Brillo Pad" Neill devoted his insightful media column in the *Evening Standard* last week to editorial changes at the Scottish *Daily Record*, a subject of vital interest to Londoners.

The sacking of *Record* editor Peter Cox, he revealed, had been "widely praised in newspaper circles north of the border". "The *Record* used to dominate Scottish tabloid journalism, with sales of more than 750,000 a decade ago... in the past twelve months, sales have collapsed to 507,000."

What a pathetic performance! It has only taken Neill three years to lose the same proportion of readers from the *Scotsman* where he is editor-in-chief: just over 100,000 in 2000 down to 70,000 at the last count.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Our benefits package is not a major incentive in attracting people here."

— Sir Andrew Green, chairman of Migration Watch UK, *Daily Mail*, 9 May, page 12.

"Many are attracted by Britain's benefits system."

— Editorial on immigration, *Daily Mail*, 9 May, page 12.

WHAT on earth was former Clinton "campaign strategist" Dick Morris doing writing in the *Telegraph* last week?

As the man who had cynically guided the paper's bete noire Bill Clinton to electoral success before resigning after admitting to sleeping with a prostitute, Morris was surely viewed as the devil incarnate by Charles Moore and his fellow high-minded Tories.

In 1997 Alexander Chancellor used his Footnote column to call Morris "a sleazebag". A year later, when Morris reared his head during the Monicagate scandal, the newspaper gleefully raked over the sordid detail of his demise. "According to Sherry Rowlands, the prostitute Mr Morris hired, he only rarely had conventional sex with her. He preferred her to suck his toes, tickle his naked body and rub her feet over his face, his chest and genitals, pressing as hard as she could. He would then 'go on all fours like a dog under my feet'."

Then in 2000 a *Telegraph* leader described it as "most alarming" when it emerged that Tony Blair's own pollster, Philip Gould, viewed Morris as some sort of guru.

It was only when one saw the headline of Morris's recent piece that all became clear. "Britain's future lies over the Atlantic — not the Channel," it boldly declared. Up to a point Lord Black!

JOHN McEntee's "Wicked Whispers" column in the *Daily Mail* continues to plumb new depths of piss-poor pointlessness.

"Channel 4's Krishnan Guru-Murthy's split from girlfriend and *Watchdog* presenter Kate Sanderson highlights the number of highflying Asian presenters with white partners," he informed his readers on 14 May. "They include CNN's Daljit Dhaliwal, who has just married his white partner; Sky's Lisa Aziz, who was formerly married to a white Dutchman but is now divorced; Anya Sitaram from BBC News 24, who has a white partner; as well as the BBC's Nina Hossain and Zeinab Badawi, ITN's Shiulie Ghosh and Channel 4's Samira Ahmed, who are all married to white guys. And that's before mentioning West Indian Sir Trevor McDonald and Sri Lankan George Alagiah, who both have white wives."

Well, fancy that! His theory is only slightly let down when you discount the one non-Asian, two non-partners and Daljit Dhaliwal, who is actually a woman. *And* she "just" got married in September 2001. But there's definitely a point in there somewhere.

EX-*Guardian* editor Peter Preston now makes his living penning his characteristically tortuous pieces on the state of the media for various publications, including the *World Press Freedom Review*, published by the US-based International Press Institute.

Preston's column in the current issue is devoted to how journalists can best protect their sources when threatened with legal action. He cites a number of court cases during the last year which threaten the first rule of hackery: "Sources ought to be safe."

Oh dear. Unfortunately he finds no room to record details of one case which threatened the principle of anonymity more than any other: that of Sarah Tisdall back in 1983. Tisdall was a young civil servant in the ministry of defence who blew the whistle on Michael Heseltine's plans for the arrival of US cruise missiles at Greenham Common by leaking documents to the *Guardian*.

She subsequently received a six-month jail sentence after the documents were meekly handed back to the government by the paper's editor – one Peter Preston.

BAD news for feature writers everywhere: they will no longer be able to comment on how many people are hospitalised each year by tea cosies.

The department of trade and industry is to stop collecting statistics on home and leisure accidents, consumer affairs minister Melanie Johnson announced. She blamed "pressure on resources". The annual report frequently contained such gems as the fact that in 2001, 91 people were injured by bread bins. It also revealed that more people ended up in casualty after accidents involving glossy magazines than were injured by chainsaws.

Oh, and 40 people were injured by tea cosies.

DESPAIRING *Indie* hacks have a new nickname for gormless "wunderkind" Johann Hari, the newspaper's star hiring to replace David Aaronovitch. He is now known as Bum Fluff.

The teenage scribbler has already been caught dusting off copy penned for the *New Statesman* and passing it off as ground-breaking original thinking for his new bosses at the *Indie*. But it is Bum Fluff's apparently startling ignorance of basic history and geography that has most startled colleagues.

"Is Casablanca an Arab country?" he recently asked them. This was almost as jaw-dropping as the thoughtful columnist's question about Britain's military past. "Did British troops actually fight the Japanese in World War Two?" The boy will go far.

11.55 God Almighty Griff Rhys Jones (T)
(S) *4472380*

The Guardian Guide

FATCATWATCH

EDITORS love a juicy fat cat story. So the news that GlaxoSmithKline chief executive Jean-Pierre Garnier had had his £22m "golden parachute" deal rejected by shareholders was a guaranteed nice little earner for last week's front pages.

"FAT CAT LOSES £22MILLION CREAM" screeched the **Daily Mail**, which devoted two full pages to the "huge blow against the City's fat cat culture". "Such cases create an air of damaging cynicism by giving the impression that big firms are run by cosy cabals of backscratchers," thundered a special comment column on page 6. "This is hardly suggestive of the ruthlessly meritocratic ethos that is supposed to operate in business. It should prompt some of Britain's boardrooms into a timely reassessment of the reward system at the top."

Wise words – and ones which are sure to resonate in the boardroom of the Daily Mail and General Trust, which last year handed over share options which could be worth £14m by 2008 to *Mail* editor Paul Dacre. This was in addition to Dacre's £760,000 salary, £400,000 pension and £74,000 in benefits, which see him far out-earning the company chairman Viscount Rothermere (a mere £520k plus share options), who won his position through the ruthlessly meritocratic system of, er, inheriting it from his dad.

The **Mirror**, meanwhile, was equally outraged at the "obscene package" with its "payoff for failure". As its editorial sternly put it: "Rewarding failure is a scandal – and that is what has been increasingly happening in British business". One place where it certainly happens is Trinity Mirror, which last December recruited a new chief executive, Sly Bailey, with the promise of a guaranteed £250,000 bonus in addition to her half a million salary, however badly the ailing company does this year.

The **Express** took a similar working man's view. "Fat cat directors had better get ready for leaner times," its editorial warned. "Boardroom greed will no longer be tolerated… It is the shareholders who own public companies. Directors must do their bidding instead of arrogantly ignoring them." Of course this doesn't apply in the case of Northern & Shell, the private company that owns the Express. Richard Desmond, the sole shareholder, raised no objection to the £12m pay rise he awarded himself last month.

The **Independent** went a step further, devoting its entire front page to the top ten "directors who have proved the worst value for money", complete with mug shots (Garnier only came in at number six). The paper's own boss, Sir Tony O'Reilly, did not feature as he earns a mere £650,000 and took no pay rise this year. This meant that all the more was left for his fellow directors of Independent News and Media, who received on average a 40 percent boost in pay, despite the company's profits falling by 64 percent in the last year, and share prices dipping by a third.

Over at the **Telegraph**, however, Garnier got something of an easy ride. City editor Neil Collins was granted an interview with the great man himself, a scoop which was plugged on Wednesday's front page with the gigantic quote: "I'm not Mother Teresa. This is a highly competitive business." Inside Garnier chuckled that "that vote was only advisory", and pointed out, entirely reasonably, that he is just like a soldier fighting for his country (France). "Timing is everything in this country and it's not always right to be first. On the Normandy beaches, the first wave died and the third wave got the girls in Paris." Whether the men of the 153rd infantry brigade received £22m for their efforts, he did not recall. "JP and I are getting on like a house on fire," confided second lieutenant Collins.

Could the Telegraph's keenness to stroke the fattest of cats rather than pull his tail have anything to do with recent events in its own parent company, Hollinger International? The day after Glaxo shareholders rejected Garnier's pay package, two rather interesting events occurred.

Firstly, the *Telegraph*'s owners suspended the rights of certain shareholders to sell their stock because of the danger of "unduly impairing the liquidity" of the company. Then a US fund management firm which owns around 18 percent of Hollinger's shares filed an official complaint with US regulators demanding the return of £45m which had been "siphoned off" by executive directors of the company, and threatening legal action.

Hollinger's directors include such charming figures as Lord Black, his wife Barbara Amiel, Henry Kissinger, Richard Perle, Lord Weidenfeld and Alfred Taubman, the ex-Sotheby's boss who recently left prison following his role in a price-fixing racket. Many executives are paid additional fees through Black's management company, the Ravelston Corporation, which last year received more than £25m from Hollinger, which recorded a £146m loss. Amiel also runs a separate consultancy which receives management fees from Hollinger.

Most of Fleet Street's business pages spent the week crowing over Hollinger's difficulties, and anticipating great drama at the company's AGM in New York on Friday. In the event the British press – even Neil Collins and his *Telegraph* team – were barred from the meeting, at which Lord Black was forced to agree to set up an independent investigation into executive pay and to sell his controlling stake in the company for £71m.

The *Telegraph*'s only comment was a brief, unbylined piece in its City section, in which Black accused his investors of making "fantastic claims about self-enrichment". "Like all fads, corporate governance has its zealots," he told the paper. "We will do our best to make sure the corporate governance crusaders don't throw out the baby with the bathwater." So that's all right then. Trebles all round!

"It's so realistic! Imagine an internet chat-room with interactive 3D graphics!"

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Tattoos are the new sex." — *Daily Star*.

"Mint is the new basil." — *Chatelaine* magazine.

"Is oak the new pine?" — *Real City* magazine (Cambridge).

"Sunbeds are the new cigarettes." — *Sydney Morning Herald*.

"Southend, the new Vegas." – The *Times* property supplement.

"The North East is the new South West." — Advert from Northern Region Liberal Democrats.

"Ironing is now the new yoga." — Jayne Dawson ("Yorkshire feature writer of the year"), *Yorkshire Post*.

"Are kids the new adults and adults the new kids?" — *Evening Standard*.

"Is Mauritius the new Barbados?" — *Daily Telegraph* travel feature.

IN THE TEAROOM

"OH DEAR. Someone got their sums wrong." It may be a lame excuse to offer cash-strapped schools preparing to lay off teachers, but it's what "new" Labour is telling the children. It is not, however, what they're telling the grown-ups.

In the tearoom there's been talk of another kind of calculation altogether. One in which the perfidious treasury, led by top wrangler Gordon Brown, is blamed for the funding fiasco – cunningly worked out as a way of stuffing education secretary and leadership-rival Charles Clarke good and proper.

Blair-loyalist in the soup, chancellor must be behind it. It's a facile equation, but indicative of the prevailing paranoid mood. The Brownites are just as bad. No sooner has No 10 dutifully slapped down Peter Mandelson for his insulting intervention on the euro, than the chancellor's friends are whispering that the reprimand was all for show and that the PM's crew had put Mandy up to the women's lobby briefing in the first place.

When the going gets this weird, everyone has to watch out. Even those who are perennially cautious have to be extra careful. Who'd have thought that the slippery Europe minister Denis McShane would or could have uttered an ambiguity that wasn't "studied"? Yet there he was loosely talking about civil-war as if it might have been taking place in the Labour party (which would have been a "gaffe") rather than in the country at large (a "non-gaffe"). Still, he recovered sharpish. There's a man who understands the unwritten rules drawn up by the committee that never meets.

If you're in the mood for feeling sorry for politicians, pity the ones who have to pay homage to both Brown and Blair. Chief secretary Paul Boateng, for instance, sent into the treasury as Tony's nark but who has to work with Gordon day-to-day. The hitherto irrepressibly voluble Boateng has fallen silent. A storm must be about to break.

'Urquhart'

THE Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust is £8m in debt and yet is advertising for a new chief executive at a starting salary of £120,000 – slightly more than that of the prime minister.

The advertisement points out, however, that "more may be available for an exceptional candidate". He or she will have to be "an experienced politically aware chief executive" because "the complex multi-site organisation is rarely out of the spotlight".

Eye readers will recall that Worcester's PFI-funded hospital was at the centre of the controversy over the private finance initiative that slashed the number of beds and led to the effective closure of acute services at Kidderminster Hospital. The move so infuriated people in the area that they replaced the "new" Labour MP for Wyre Forest with an Independent, retired hospital consultant Dr Richard Taylor.

Commenting on the advertisement for a new chief executive, Mr Taylor told the *Eye*: "Perhaps Mr Blair should apply." The problem seems to be that Dr Taylor got on rather well with the acting chief executive and even praised him in a recent press release. Obviously, he had to be replaced by someone more politically aware.

A VAST oilfield with an estimated 20 billion barrels in it has been put up for grabs in the US. No, it's not in Iraq but part of the United Kingdom's continental shelf, aka the North Sea.

Energy minister Brian Wilson flew to Houston earlier this month to tempt North American companies with what he called "the vast wealth of investment opportunities that exist". "Government and industry have worked tirelessly to make sure that the climate is right for potential investors to reap the significant rewards available in the UK sector," he said.

Wilson was attending the Offshore Technologies Conference, officially described as the world's largest oil and gas bazaar. The department of trade hailed the event as an opportunity to "capitalise on new technology and existing skills to create the right environment for new entrants to prosper in a vibrant market".

As a lure Wilson mentioned the "unparalleled expertise that UK companies, especially in Scotland, can offer – most notably in deepwater technologies, multi-directional drilling, sub-sea engineering, decommissioning and working in harsh environments". He added: "The importance of the North Sea and its related industries cannot be under-estimated."

He means "over-estimated" – but no matter. The message is plain. As Harold Macmillan might have put it, "new" Labour is keen to sell off the family silver. In essence it wants to sell large stakes in our oil and gas, to allow it to be extracted and guzzled faster rate than we could manage ourselves.

The alternative is to leave it underground for a while longer and give future generations a chance to benefit from it. But that would deprive chancellor Gordon Brown of money he wants in a hurry. So the government is prepared to let outsiders put down their capital to help balance Britain's budget in the short term.

FORMER Labour party staff are demanding to know what is to become of their pensions. According to *Professional Pensions Magazine*, they are accusing the party of "raiding the surplus" of its £30m pension fund.

One disgruntled member has written to party treasurer Jimmy Elsby asking why the scheme's normal contributions have been offset by a £75,000 annual "amortisation expense". Director of finance Steve Uttley says the pensions fund shortfall is the result of a "short contributions holiday resulting from a surplus that arose back in 1992".

Given the parlous state of the stock market, the future for pension holders like former general-secretaries Lord Sawyer and Margaret McDonagh looks bleak. And by unhappy coincidence, the crisis falls on the watch of new party chairman Ian McCartney – the former Minister for No Pensions.

PATRICIA HEWITT and Margaret Beckett geared up for the government-inspired "Great Debate on GM" by making two new appointments to the agriculture and environment biotechnology commission (AEBC), the government's strategic adviser on GM crops.

The two new appointees are Dr David Buckeridge, business director of Advanta Seeds, and Dr Paul Rylott, UK head of bioscience for Bayer Cropscience.

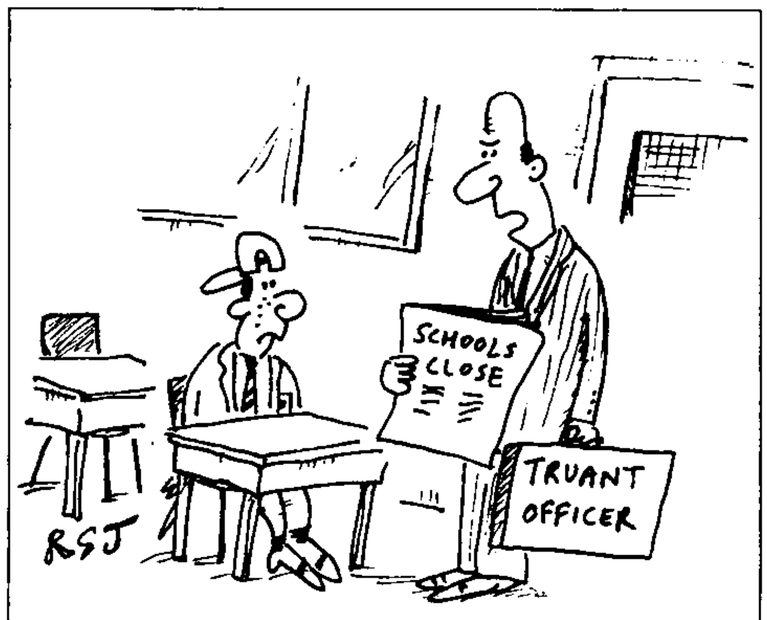
Advanta hit the headlines in 2000 when it illegally sold GM oilseed rape in Britain. The seeds were supposed to be GM–free but had been contaminated by Monsanto crops. At the time Advanta's main UK spokesman was one David Buckeridge. He assured the country that everything was OK.

Meanwhile Bayer Cropscience is the leading firm pushing for the commercial use of GM. Dr Rylott also chairs the agricultural biotechnology council, a pro-GM lobby group funded by Bayer, Monsanto and three other GM manufacturers.

THE last fallacy of fish farming – that it supports upwards of 6,500 jobs in "fragile, remote rural areas" – has finally been exposed: more than 2,500 of these supposedly vital jobs appear to be held by foreign immigrant workers, approximately 800 of whom are in the UK illegally.

In a swoop on fish processing plants code-named "Operation Shark", the department for work and pensions and the police also discovered that many of these immigrants were working 12-hour shifts, seven days a week, and were being paid less than the minimum wage.

Scottish Quality Salmon, which represents more than 60 percent of Scotland's farm salmon industry, including the Dutch-owned multinational Marine Harvest, refused to comment. However, the fish farmers seem to be covered: it is the responsibility of the labour agencies to ensure their workers are in the UK legally, not those who employ them.



"Shouldn't you be at home?"

IN 1789 US president George Washington, still a new player on the international scene, introduced the Alien Tort Claims Act (ATCA) to tackle a rash of piracy on the high seas.

Little could Washington have expected that in 2003 British business people would be throwing so much weight behind a campaign to dump the law. Yet in its new annual report, the International Chamber of Commerce UK branch (ICC-UK) lists its concern over the act as one of the two issues it has lobbied the government over this year (the other was climate change protocols).

The ICC-UK is fiercely pestering Tony Blair and colleagues to take the matter up with their pals across the water, saying "the way this act is now being used is an unacceptable extra-territorial extension of the jurisdiction of US law".

So why is the ICC-UK campaigning so strongly? The act is currently being used in a legal action brought against oil company Shell by American campaigning charity Earthrights and the families of Nigerian activists Ken Saro-Wiwa and John Kpuinen. Royal Dutch/Shell is charged with complicity in human rights abuses, including the 1995 hangings of Saro-Wiwa and Kpuinen, the torture and detention of Owens Wiwa and the shooting by Nigerian troops of a woman protesting at the bulldozing of her crops to make way for a Shell pipeline.

ATCA happens to give US courts jurisdiction in international matters involving torture and extra-judicial killing (presumably intended to deal with walking the plank and other piratical menaces). Earthrights is helping communities in Burma and India to put together similar cases against other multinationals.

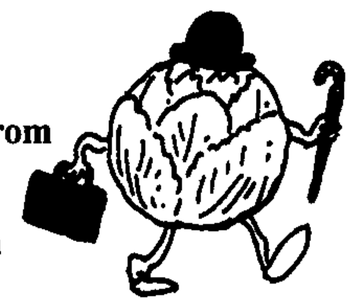
And who is the current chairman of the ICC-UK? None other than Phil Watts, chairman of the committee of managing directors of... the Royal Dutch/Shell Group of companies.

***PRIVATE Eye* erroneously suggested (issue 1076) that while Russia opposed the war on Iraq it was supplying allied forces in the Gulf using Antonov cargo aeroplane.**

In fact the Antonov is essentially a Ukrainian aeroplane; and it was Antonov Airlines, owned by the Ukrainian state and working in partnership with the UK's Air Foyle Heavylift, which flew many of the supply flights.

'Backbiter'

BRUSSELS SPROUTS



DESPITE warnings from the European Union's formidable chief accounting officer Marta Andreasen that the EU's computer software system was hopelessly insecure, euro-fiddling is on the increase.

Only recently, officials of the EU's statistical office Eurostat have been charged with dodgy dealings linked to mysterious Euro companies called Eurocost and Eurogramme which managed to acquire £1m of EU taxpayers' money from Eurostat before going into liquidation.

In a special letter to the European commission on 16 May, the European court of auditors voiced concern that "weaknesses in the accounting and management information systems revealed by this audit have been repeatedly pointed out by the court in previous reports". In particular it criticised the accounting and management systems MIS and SINCOM and said the entire accounting system needed to be reformed.

In its reply, the commission stated that "many weaknesses identified by the court in the SINCOM system have already been corrected, in particular those concerning security over access to the system" and promised change "under the Financial Regulation which came into force in 2003".

How odd, then, that Mrs Andreasen was promptly sacked when she told sleaze commissioner Neil Kinnock in May 2002 that the system was insecure and incoherent. Not only did the commission immediately try to discredit her, but it prevented her from voicing her concerns to the budget committee of the European parliament by taking disciplinary action against her. In their last annual report, the auditors included the "overstatement by 148.7 million euros of provisions paid to member states" on agriculture; "entry without adequate justification" of 980 million euros for cash transfers in third countries; "provision of 564 million euros set up on doubtful bases" for dismantling nuclear installations; and "overstatement of commitments by about 1,318 million euros".

Perhaps this was because Mrs Andreasen's boss, Jean-Paul Mingasson, the director-general of the commission's budget department, "did not see the need for an accounting system", according to EU internal audit chief Jules Muis (*FT*, 16 May).

Such sloppy dealings have now led to six investigations into fraud and mismanagement, including one against Eurostat's director-general Yves Franchet and director Daniel Byk.

"We'll bung you a few grand if you slip in some anti-corruption clauses"

TUC NEWS

ROGER "Currant Bun" Lyons, the MSF-Amicus general secretary whose recent attempt to wangle himself a pension-boosting 30 percent pay rise was turned down by the union's national executive committee (*Eye* 1075), has suffered another setback.

He has been caught out trying to bend union rules to stay in office for another five years without having to stand for reelection. In power since 1991 and last elected on 1 September 1997, Lyons should have faced a further ballot before 30 August last year. But he took advantage of a loophole in the trade union and labour relations act (Tulra) which allows a general secretary to stay on without a further ballot if he is less than five years from retirement at the time the election would be due. With good timing a union boss could remain in office for the best part of a decade without having to face an election.

Alas, spoilsport NEC colleague David Hutchinson spotted that Lyons had given his retirement date as 14 September 2007, 10 years *and 13 days* after his last election.

When Hutchinson raised his concerns at a meeting of the NEC, Lyons crony Bob Braddock suggested the minutes of an NEC meeting held last October should be amended to show that it had agreed to bring Lyons's retirement date forward to on or before 1 August 2007 – thus bringing him within the five-year deadline. When put to the vote, this grubby fix was carried by nine votes to five, with 12 of Lyons's normal supporters abstaining.

Hutchinson has reported the matter to the government's union watchdog, the trade union certification officer. The days of buns must surely be numbered.

'Blackleg'

Court Circular

THE *Sunset Times*'s front page story that William and Harry are both seeking to join the army claimed that William is set on Sandhurst but will loiter for a couple of years to be able to go at the same time as Harry, so they can compete head-to-head for the Sovereign's Sword.

This fantasy caused ironic laughter among senior flunkeys who spend much of their time worrying about William's lack of military ambition (*Eye* 1080). As revealed in the *Eye*, the pressure is certainly on the reluctant prince to get into uniform. The idea that he will have to have some time in military service has become non-negotiable – but it is very much to William's dismay.

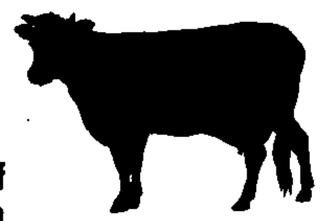
The standing lord chamberlain's committee has already concluded that it would be impossible for a future king to become a credible head of the armed forces without having served himself. That view has been reinforced by Harry's determination to have a military career, possibly opting not to go to university at all, or taking an army scholarship in order to study.

The prospect of the king's brother wearing uniform alongside a lounge-suited monarch doesn't appeal one bit to the royal image-makers. Prince Philip has never got over the sight of one of his children taking part in the Queen Mother's state funeral wearing a suit amid a sea of military splendour. Edward's failure to make it in the Marines has always irked Philip and increased the pressure on William, who was close to his Uncle Ed until the notorious Ardent "stalking" incident at St Andrews.

Although all talk still focuses on the army as the prince's training ground, Philip is preparing for one last battle to get either William or Harry into his beloved Navy – even possibly the Marines, to whom he feels he owes a favour or two.

'Flunkey'

DOWN ON THE FARM



SINCE 1 May tens of thousands of people in Britain have been deliberately committing criminal offences and getting away with it.

Nothing unusual about that, you may think. Except that, in this instance, not only does the government admit there is little it can do about it, but local councils are actually encouraging the criminals to carry on breaking the law because it is the only sensible thing to do.

The criminals are all those farmers who in recent weeks have continued to do what farmers have done since the dawn of time when their animals die of natural causes: namely to bury them or leave them out for foxes and crows to get rid of them nature's way. Since 1 May this has become an illegal act. What farmers are now meant to do with stillborn lambs or cows which die of old age is put them in a safe place then ring up the National Disposal Service to come and take them away for incineration or rendering down into powder so that they can be put into a landfill site, at a total cost to British farmers, says the NFU, of £70m a year.

The only trouble is that there is no National Disposal Service to ring up because the government has not yet got round to organising one.

It is hard to think of any piece of legislation more absurd and unnecessary than the so-called animal by-products regulation, 1774/2002, which officials employed by Brussels commissioner David Byrne came up with one day last year when they had nothing better to do (although to be fair it must have taken them more than a day, since it is 95 pages long). Mr Byrne's high-minded intention was to prevent the spread of animal diseases such as BSE and foot-and-mouth by issuing an edict that it would no longer be legal for farmers, supermarkets or any other commercial food producer to bury any animal product, from a dead chicken to a cheese sandwich.

No sooner had Brussels given the order than their underlings at Defra jumped to obey. The only trouble was that no one had actually bothered to work out how the diktat might operate in practice. There is no spare capacity in Britain's 15 large-scale incinerators to take on the millions of tons of meat products chucked away every year. And, as the supermarkets were quick to point out, you can't render down the contents of plastic wrapped chicken tikka marsala unless you first separate the meat product from the packaging, which would mean Tesco and Asda having to employ thousands of extra staff to sort one from the other.

Since Defra listens to supermarkets, Sainsbury's and Safeway were given a two-year delay so they could work out what the hell to do about it. But of course it's not Defra's policy to listen to farmers. So the ban on burying fallen farm stock – several million animals a year – came into force on 1 May, even though the government has now had to extend its own deadline for working out how to begin setting up a disposal service until the end of the month. In the meantime councils such as Somerset have said farmers should carry on burying animals as before, lest tourists be put off by the piles of corpses all over the countryside. What the farmers say doesn't bear repetition in a family magazine.

'Muckspreader'

Number crunching

80% ■ percentage of British people who want referendum on EU Constitution

80% ■ percentage of British people who say they have no idea what is in the EU Constitution

TV

Apply Immediately
Mr & Mrs
(both BBC2)
The Michael Essany Show
(C4)

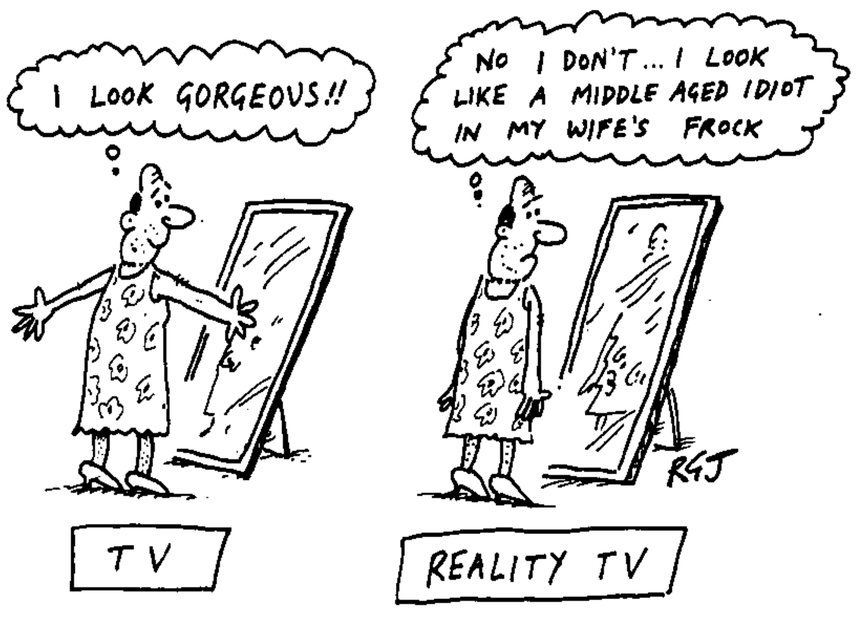
"HUMAN kind/ Cannot bear very much reality" wrote TS Eliot in 1936. A poignant thought but one that makes you wonder what TS would have made of the prime-time TV schedules for the night of Wednesday 28 May 2003. It would appear he was totally wrong: human kind can bear an awful lot of reality.

On this night alone, three new series are beginning. With *I'm A Celebrity* just finished and *Big Brother* revving up for another summer of manufactured frenzy, TS would probably have to mutter something allusive and eat his hat.

To begin with further proof of BBC2's long-term commitment to the arts, er, two back-to-back reality shows. In **Mr & Mrs**, a year in the life of a young couple is condensed into 40 minutes of panto. The pitch is that this four-part series will "document the state of contemporary marriage." Kibi and Mark Wright have young kids, work too hard, possess insufficient wealth for their aspirations and endure a stuttering sex life. "Is everybody's life like this?" says a wistful Kibi to camera at one point. The answer is yes, and no – our lives are probably similar, but we haven't invited cameramen to camp in our cupboards and make things even tougher.

More importantly Kibi's rhetorical question reveals that she is aware of the purpose of the show. There have been too many docs like this already for people not to know what producers want, so they play to the cameras by arguing, swearing, falling out, making up, as and when required. In return the producers splice their footage to wring a drama out of the tedium. As entertainment that's fine, but "reality" it is not.

The reality for Pierre South on **Apply Immediately** is that he's knocking on 30, bored of his desk job and fancies doing



something else. He decides, with the fillip of a "dare to dream" BBC reality show, that his passion is sports journalism, and so he bins his job. When we witness the "successful" sports journalists offered up as mentors there seems no reason Pierre shouldn't make it: he's a cocky, self-regarding so-and-so and in the main so are they. But nevertheless he fails quite splendidly in every aspect, which at least lends this show a touch more realism than *Mr & Mrs*.

Most tellingly, at the end of *Apply Immediately* Pierre decides it's not sports journalism that's his passion... but broadcasting. This is what reality TV does: it suspends reality, so that for 50 minutes Pierre has gone from feeling like a nobody to being a somebody with just a camera to thank. No wonder he wants to get in to TV, and no doubt he'll fail quite splendidly at that too.

Michael Essany's passion is also broadcasting. Essany is a 19-year-old American TV nut weaned on a diet of Letterman and Leno, so that when he grew up, or even before then, he wanted to be a late night talk show host. And to judge by the title of the programme, you would say that now he is.

Not so: **The Michael Essany Show** is in fact the making of Michael's show, which is also, confusingly, called *The Michael Essany Show*. The chat show itself is put together by Essany in his parents' house, with the kitchen as the green room and his mum as everything from Wardrobe Consultant to Key Grip. In the US it is shown on his local cable network and through Essany's hard work has gathered a loyal following, even enticing some A-List guests.

When a US network finally noticed Essany late last year, fame beckoned. Yet the network decided it would be more interesting to make a reality show *about* Michael's DIY show than to see the show itself. Now this is bizarre, because from the snippets of Essany in action he's not at all bad — some good digs at Clinton, anyway. Why did they not just screen his show? It's because TV at the moment cannot get enough reality, even if it's not "real" at all. Behind the scenes or in front of them, Essany is a performer who knows the drill just like the Wrights and sad old Pierre South.

'The Zapper'

AD NAUSEAM

MAYBE it's something in the water, but May appears to be condom month. Both leading players in prophylactics, Durex and Mates, have recently launched campaigns encouraging us to keep our peckers up.

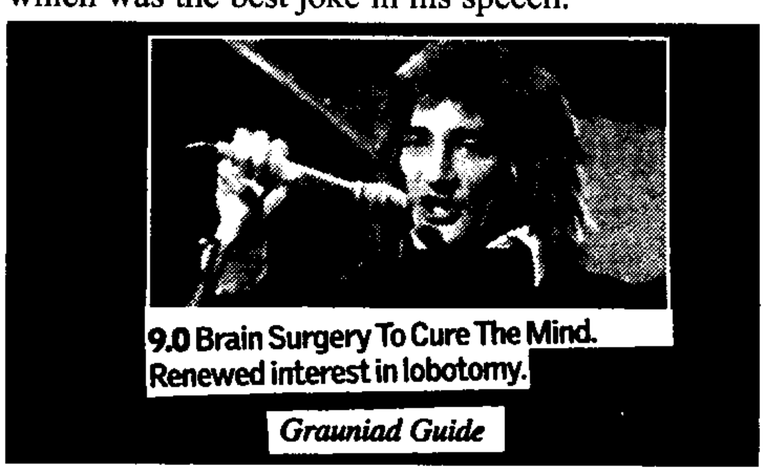
Neither is particularly interesting in itself but the attempts to ban them illustrate again the failings of self-regulation in advertising.

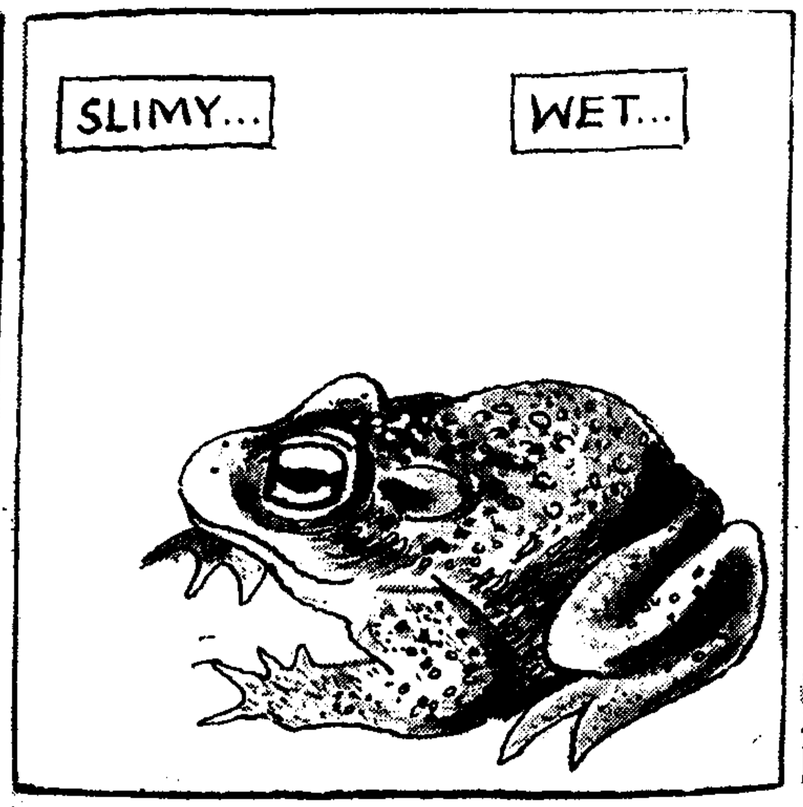
Durex's sell was that its Performa condom, which is supposed to prolong ejaculation, gives you more bang for your buck. One tagline in particular, "Roger More", was bound to cause consternation.

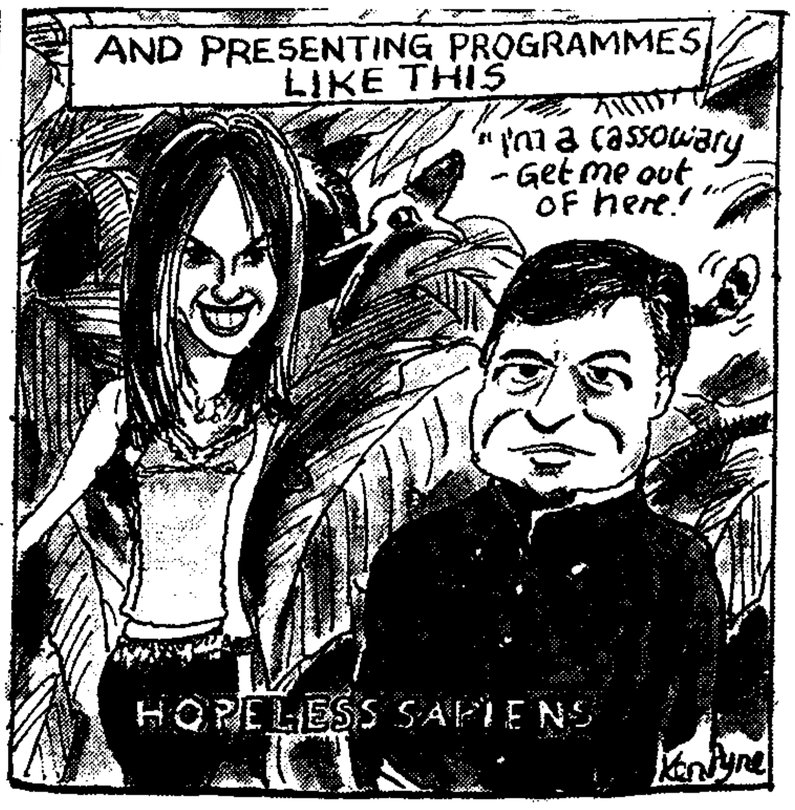
Before the campaign was even launched, the trade rag *Marketing* predicted that it was "likely to attract complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority". Durex went through the ASA's copy advice team and was advised to alter the wording. In the best tradition of the ASA it duly ignored the advice and the poster ran for a month before being pulled after the predicted complaints came in. In other words, everyone knew it would attract objections and the ASA was powerless to do anything about it. Anyone who recalls the whole FCUK saga (*Eyes passim*) will know we have been here before.

Mates chose to circumvent the ASA entirely by running flyposters. Because these are illegal, they do not fall under the jurisdiction of the ASA and so it is up to local councils to nobble the perpetrators. Ad Nauseam knows of only one example of this occurring in the last four years, even though flyposting is practically ubiquitous. Safe from punishment, Mates went to town with its "I Shagged Here" campaign, encouraging spontaneous nookie. Flyposters with brazen innuendos like "taking the tube to Cockfosters" and "parking the pink bus" were everywhere, while the ASA was impotent. If local authorities *do* want to speak to Mates, by the way, it is owned by Ansell Healthcare and its advertising agency is Minerva.

These two examples make a mockery of the self-regulatory system in print advertising, so Ad Nauseam was amused to hear that the chairman of Ofcom, the new uber-regulator which will lay down the future of broadcast regulation, is a great admirer of the ASA. Lord Currie's speech at last week's Advertising Association lunch confirmed that under Ofcom all advertising is likely to be made self-regulatory and the model will be... the ASA! Currie concluded that the advertising industry was "confident, mature and responsible" which was the best joke in his speech.







DUMB BRITAIN

Daryl's Drivetime, Virgin Radio

Daryl Denham: Name Les Dennis's estranged wife.

Contestant: Margaret Thatcher.

Denham: Are you absolutely sure?

Contestant: That's the one.

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Cro-Magnon was an early form of which mammal, which now numbers in the billions?

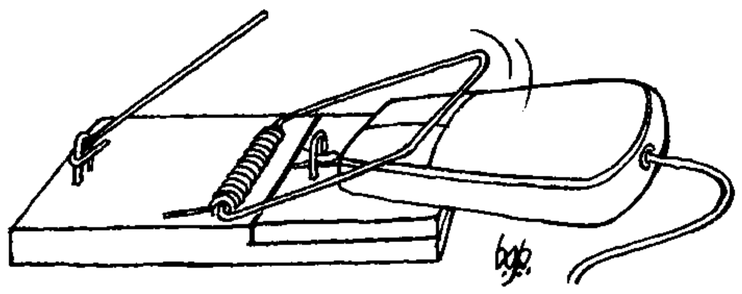
Contestant: Crabs.

AR: Which composer wrote The Magic Flute?

Contestant: Bikini.

HAS ITN no shame? Yet more blatant plugs for ITV programmes are appearing as "news" items on its bulletins for ITV1.

Recent highlights include reports about *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*, *Coronation Street* and even *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here*. And on 10 May it was the turn of the British Soap Awards to get a mention. ITV's *Coronation Street* had "swept the board", winning nine awards, Penny Marshall revealed four days before the "big event".



MARK THOMPSON, chief executive of Channel 4, announced a clear direction for the station at its agm at the end of last month: it aimed to "do things first, make trouble, inspire change, and to be Britain's bravest and most original broadcaster".

An example of those values in action was provided by the Independent Television Commission a week later, in a report on Channel 4's *T4* strand of programming aimed at teenagers on Sunday mornings. Commenting on a relationship between two characters in the teen soap *Hollyoaks*, presenter June Sarpong made the charming observation that the man in question would need "a big package" because "Mrs C's an old woman and there's a lot of room around there."

T4 is usually broadcast live and the standard defence in such cases is that presenters get carried away in the heat of the moment. In this instance, however, Sarpong's remarks were prerecorded and no one at Channel 4 thought they were inappropriate for broadcasting to children at 12.15 on a Sunday lunchtime. The ITC, however, said it was a breach of its programme code and a "serious misjudgement".

TV licence-payers will be delighted to hear the more innovative ideas to have come out of BBC director-general Greg Dyke's Making It Happen, "Big Conversation" event.

Alongside promises of feedback and mentoring for staff, hacks can now look forward to being able to spend 12 percent of the cost of moving to "new space" on "furnishing/colour schemes" at "great spaces workshops".

There will also be "audience champions to make visitors to the BBC feel valued" and an "ambassador's tool kit for anyone representing the BBC externally".

Any mention of actual programme-making? Perish the thought!

ITN BALLS

VIEWERS must be growing used to the frequent cock-ups made by cash-strapped news hounds at ITN. For those who might have missed them, recent gems have included:

Brian Capron, the actor who plays *Coronation Street* killer Richard Hillman, became Brian Caplan.

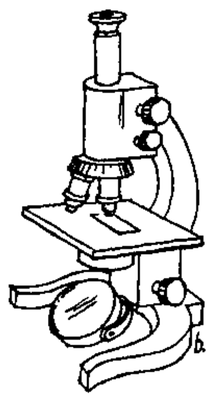
US president J.F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1965 (it was 1963).

Jamie Bulger's killers were Robert Venables and Jon Thompson (Robert Thompson and Jon Venables).

The Labour Party was once led by Jim Smith.

(Similar submissions gratefully received.)

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



MORE cloning nonsense, this time courtesy of Channel 4, which on 17 May trumpeted the efforts of one Dr Panayiotis Zavos to produce the "world's first human clone".

Unlike the Raelians, Dr Zavos is at least a real doctor and he does indeed seem to have managed the feat of fusing a cell nucleus from an egg with an adult body cell – the so-called "Dolly Technique". Viewers were told he had managed to get the cell to divide, into a bundle of 10 cells. This he plans to implant in the womb of a 46-year-old woman where it will hopefully grow into a baby nine months later.

Towards the beginning of 2004, the programme intoned, the world will witness the birth of the first human clone. The trouble is, the people who really know about cloning agree that Dr Zavos is realistically no more likely to produce a clone than the loony Raelians. He has cloned embryonic cells to divide (a feat already managed in the US by biotech firm ACT and by a team of Korean medics), but what he has not demonstrated is that the embryo he has produced has been "reprogrammed" by the nucleus – the key to cloning. Indeed, work on monkeys suggests that primates in general may be extremely difficult to clone thanks to the nature of the tiny organelles in their cells which organise the movement of chromosomes during cell division.

Tragically, where Dr Zavos (and the Raelians) are doomed to fail, someone, somewhere will one day overcome the technical difficulties and succeed in producing the by-now almost mythical "first human clone". This will be tragic not because clones represent any new or bizarre moral threat, but simply because a cloned baby will probably suffer terrible congenital abnormalities, as experiences with animals have shown.

Programmes like this simply serve to encourage the belief that cloning is a reality and to encourage the desperate to offer their money to those unscrupulous enough to offer them a bogus solution to their quest for a child.

'Boffin'

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

Queen Mary Archer

OH YEAH? "JEREMY Corbyn, the Labour MP and a critic of the war, said that it was not Jemini who had disgusted millions of Eurovision voters, but Tony Blair, adding: 'It could be that the song was just truly awful and deserved it, but I think there's actually a deeper story here. People across Europe are fed up with Britain's over-close relationship with the United States and arrogance in the rest of the world, and the war in Iraq demonstrates this very well'."

— *Sunday*, GMTV.

Number crunching

3 ■ number of people who climbed Everest in May 1953

300 ■ number of people climbing Everest in May 2003

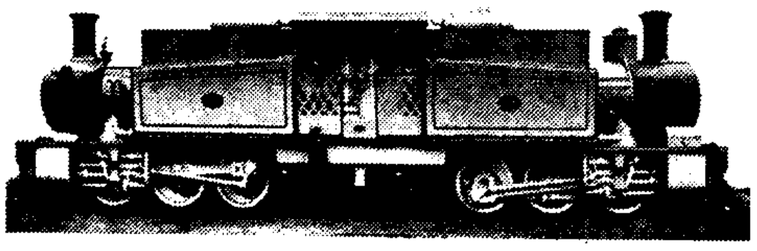
OUT OF CON-TEXT

BEN ELTON and Queen's *We Will Rock You* is the musical the critics loved to hate. But you'd never guess this from the fulsome tributes plastered all over the awnings of the Dominion Theatre.

Thus, according to the *Independent*: "THE SONGS REMIND YOU HOW FABULOUS QUEEN WERE!" As you might guess, there was a "but" in Fiona Sturges' original review of what she called a "trite and tacky" show: "'Under Pressure', 'Killer Queen', 'Somebody To Love' and 'I Want To Break Free' all remind you how fabulous Queen were and will have even the most curmudgeonly punter tapping their feet. But it's hard to see the point of making a musical out of them when you can simply go out and buy a record."

SUPERMODELS

KERBER



SIGNAL FAILURES

Emperor's new clothes

JO MOORE, the spindoctor who said 9/11 was a good day to bury bad news, has long since left the transport department... but her legacy thrives.

An opinion poll has shown more dissatisfaction with public transport than any other government area including health. The department's response is not to fix the transport system, however: it is to tackle those insolent little boys who say the wrong things about the emperor's new clothes.

The commission for integrated transport (CFIT), for instance, may be scrapped because it comes up with too much impartial advice (ie negative publicity). CFIT was set up in 1999 in the brief period "new" Labour seemed interested in a balanced and sustainable transport policy. Now that Labour is merely appeasing the voracious road lobby and slashing rail funding, transport secretary Alistair Darling wonders whether CFIT is "relevant and necessary to delivery of government policy".

Abolishing the equally irritating regional rail passenger committees would be difficult as they're enshrined in law. The official directions for the "strategic" rail authority state the committees must "remain clearly independent of the authority" – but appointments are made by, er, the SRA and transport ministers.

While Wendy Toms chaired the southern England committee she was an outspoken passengers' advocate and publicly challenged the SRA to explain why its cost estimate for two electrification schemes it didn't like was more than five times the estimate of one of Britain's most experienced electrical contractors (*Eye* 1067). Chairmen normally have two periods in office but when she reapplied she was found by the interview panel not to be relevant or necessary.

Jo Moore would have been proud of Darling's performance at the dispatch box on 13 May when he said that he, the SRA and his department were giving train companies a clear message: "They must look to their faults and weaknesses, ensure that their trains run on time and achieve far better performance." Behind the spin, the worst train operators have received massive bailouts or franchise extensions – sending the clear message they'll be protected whatever their performance.

Darling was also asked if the SRA had adopted Jo Moore's spinning strategy, given the SRA's vicious criticisms of Lord Berkeley (chairman of the rail freight group) after his opinions appeared in *Rail Professional* magazine (*Eye* 1075). Darling replied that SRA chairman Richard Bowker "has already made it clear that he disapproves of what the director of communications said about Lord Berkeley".

Er, not quite. What Bowker made clear to staff (*Eye* 1078) was that he disapproved of the bad language used but supported the principle of attacking anyone who stopped the SRA burying its bad news in peace.

While the SRA remains committed to that policy, Darling wants to draw a line under the matter. "I hope that we shall not hear any more of it," he told the Commons. Alas, a week later the SRA's attacks on Berkeley – which were recorded by an answering machine – were broadcast loud and clear on BBC Radio 4's *You and Yours*.

'Dr B. Ching'

Down on the Fish Farm

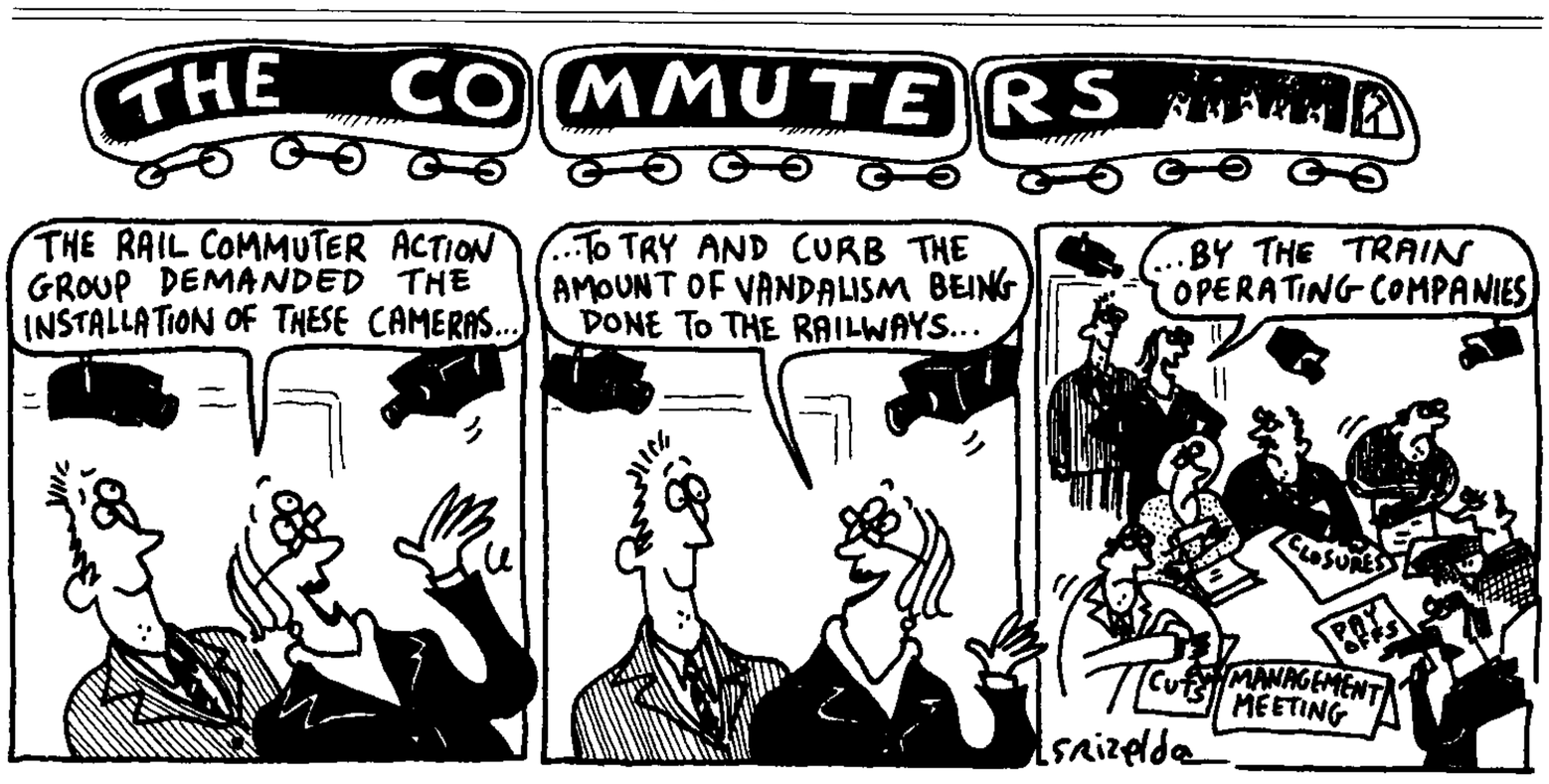
THERE was further embarrassment for the industry when the Scottish environment protection *[sic]* agency (Sepa) disclosed recently that fish farm pollution incidents had doubled in the year 2002/2003.

These included sewage fungus and fungal growth in the River Moidart; diesel oil spills into Loch Hourn; fatty fish farm deposits on a Shetland beach; decaying salmon in Loch Erisort; and sewage fungus blanketing the River Rannoch in the West Highlands.

One incident Sepa chose to ignore involved a 10-metre fish farm pontoon owned by Lighthouse of Scotland that unaccountably broke loose from its mooring in Portree Bay on the Island of Skye. Four days later, having floated undetected across a busy shipping lane, it washed up on the shore near Gairloch in mainland Scotland. The five tanks on the pontoon, labelled "hydrogen peroxide", were in fact stuffed with dead and decaying farm salmon.

And what does the Scottish executive propose to do about all this fish farm filth and deception? In the wheeling and dealing between New McLabour and the Liberal Democrats to form a new administration following the Scottish parliament elections, the fish farmers have been promised that the executive will reduce the number of regulatory agencies that govern their industry. Treble farm salmon steaks all round!

'Old Trout'


THE COMMUTERS
THE RAIL COMMUTER ACTION GROUP DEMANDED THE INSTALLATION OF THESE CAMERAS...
...TO TRY AND CURB THE AMOUNT OF VANDALISM BEING DONE TO THE RAILWAYS...
...BY THE TRAIN OPERATING COMPANIES
CLOSURES
P&K OFFS
CUTS
MANAGEMENT MEETING
Snizfldo

DOING THE ROUNDS

Simply wrong

WHEN M.D. gave evidence to the Bristol heart inquiry in 1999, he argued that in order to give consent to an operation, patients need an accurate numerical estimation of the risk of death or serious injury from it in the hands of a particular surgical team.

These figures need to be collected independently and validated externally, and they require protected resources to ensure their accuracy. They should also be in the public domain – but only when they have been "risk stratified" to allow fair comparisons that compensate the surgeons who take on more difficult cases. Instead we're getting an absurdly simplistic star system based on misleading data.

So why has it all gone wrong? Heart surgeons deserve a lot of credit for opening their work to scrutiny, but they did so on the understanding that the department of health would come up with the resources to ensure the figures produced were accurate and complete. Ministers agreed to link all 30 adult cardiac units to the central cardiac audit database (CCAD), with data collection starting in April 2002 and publication in 2004. But to date not one unit is on line to CCAD and in only a third of units have the trusts funded the necessary hardware, software and data management staff.

Faced with the decision to try to delay publication despite assurances given in parliament, or press ahead with the publication of crude mortality data, the Society of Cardiothoracic Surgeons has opted for the latter, simplified into a 1 to 3 star rating, with the inevitable consequence that higher-risk patients will be hung out to die. Young surgeons will be especially reluctant to avoid lone-star status, with the attendant risk of suspension and death knell to their private work. What's needed is not a Michelin guide but a safety system that ensures that if a surgeon's mortality rises above an agreed minimal standard, swift corrective action is taken.

It's easy to blame the department of health for this fiasco, but ironically it's "new" Labour's shift to "local accountability" that has put an extra spanner in the works. The DoH pledged money to support data collection at the start of this year; but, as ever, some trusts have decided to use it for something else and bugger the consequences. Even the combined insistence of health ministers, the heart czar and the chair of the academy of the medical royal colleges that the data collection was a "must do" has cut no ice. Trust chief executives faced with a very little money and a plethora of other targets to hit are hijacking audit funding to pay for clinical staff.

The bottom line with heart stars, as with many of Labour's health reforms, is that after vast amounts of effort and at least some money has been spent in their production, will they actually benefit patients more than they harm them? I suspect not.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

I'M PUTTING YOU ON THE WAITING LIST, BUT IT COULD BE TWO OR THREE YEARS BEFORE THE ACTUAL OPERATION...
OF COURSE, IF YOU HAD THE CASH WE COULD DO IT PRIVATELY RIGHT AWAY
GIVE ME ALL YOUR MONEY
DON'T I KNOW YOU FROM SOMEWHERE?
HOSPITAL

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

HEALTH WARNING

TAXI DRIVER Dennis Edwards has conducted a long-standing leaflet campaign alleging that Milton Keynes council officers took backhanders which resulted in extra work going the way of a taxi firm called Raffles. MK council has responded by withdrawing Edwards's licence and beginning harassment proceedings against him on behalf of staff in its taxi licensing office.

Last year a district auditor's report into Edwards's allegations concluded that "no evidence of corruption was provided or identified"; but it added that the failure of officers to keep proper records had "exposed themselves and the council to allegations of impropriety". Edwards says he welcomes his forthcoming trial as it will give him an opportunity to air his allegations in full.

Recently he had a call from a council officer who said he wanted to give him "some information". They met in a lay-by where, claims Edwards, the officer told him that "people in Scotland" were "worried about his health" should he continue to speak out.

Raffles' Private Hire's directors formerly included Robert Roden and David Deans, who were also until 2000 nominal owners of a 600-vehicle Glasgow taxi firm called Mac's Cabs. Companies House currently lists Catherine McKeon, Roden's partner, as company secretary and sole shareholder of Raffles. Mac's Cabs' true owner was Tam McGraw, commonly referred to in Scotland as that country's wealthiest criminal, aka "The Licensee". McGraw was charged in 1998 with running a huge cannabis smuggling ring but, after Scotland's most expensive criminal trial, the case was found "not proven", although his brother-in-law and two others were jailed for a total of 24 years.

In 2000 McGraw was hit with a £300,000 tax bill after a joint Customs and Inland Revenue investigation into Mac's Cabs, which he subsequently sold. In the past year three of McGraw's closest associates have met violent deaths.

SOMER TIME BLUES

BATH and north-east Somerset council (Banes) has had a major bollocking from the district auditor for misleading its tenants prior to its £85m sell-off of housing stock in 1999.

In the run-up to the transfer of 9,500 homes to the Somer Community Housing trust, concluded auditor Richard Lott, the council had acted unlawfully by issuing "unbalanced, one sided and misleading" information to tenants in the guise of impartial advice. Its £500,000 "communications strategy" – paid for by the taxpayer – had completely failed to put the case for staying with the council. Fifty-eight percent of the misled tenants duly voted for the transfer.

One of the people principally responsible, said Lott, was Banes's head of housing at the time, Alan Ward.

PS: Guess who is now chief executive of Somer Housing?

PPS: Guess who last year got the biggest pay rise of any housing association boss in the UK – 24 percent – bringing his salary up to £81,260?

● QUOTE of the week from a Westminster council spokesman, explaining the decision to "relocate" the borough's housing benefits division, which is outsourced to Crapita, 230 miles to Blackburn – effectively making 50 people redundant: "This is not... about cost-savings. This is about Capita and Westminster working together to improve housing benefit services for the borough's residents."

"Although residents may see road work with nobody there, this does not mean they are not working. They could be on the site in a different place."

East Grinstead Observer

GEOFF IN BIN

THE ordeal of publican Geoff Monks, banged up in a notorious high security prison for, er, allegedly having a piece of mouldy ham in his fridge (*Eye* 1075), becomes more surreal by the week.

Monks, landlord of the Snooty Fox pub in Lowick, near Kettering, was sentenced to four months on 5 December last year for failing to pay record fines and costs of £20,000 incurred after East Northants district council environmental health officers raided his pub in June 1998.

The highly dubious raid and prosecution came after a complaint from local solicitor Jenny Lawrence that she had fallen ill from food poisoning after eating at Monks's pub – on the very night that she had been barred after making a big scene over a small mistake in her drinks bill. Lawrence later boasted to fellow guests at a dinner party of close friendships with senior figures on East Northants council and local magistrates (*Eyes* 1077 and 1078).

While waiting in court cells to be transferred to prison on 5 December Monks suffered a heart attack and was taken to Kettering general hospital. A police guard was posted at the end of his bed. According to Monks's custody record, seen by the *Eye*, that guard was withdrawn after two days because it was "uneconomic to keep [Monks] in police custody". However, "HMP Woodhill will not provide staff to supervise". In other words, there was no point in wasting resources guarding in hospital a seriously ill prisoner who was in no fit state to go anywhere. Monks was eventually discharged on 17 December.

When he resumed his sentence at Woodhill at the beginning of April he was given a release date of 2 June. His solicitor asked for the time spent in hospital be deducted from the sentence, given that he had effectively been in police custody, notwithstanding the fact that neither the police nor the prison could be bothered to guard him. Last week the prison service gave its considered answer: Monks had been "unlawfully at large" while in hospital and would therefore have three days *added* to his time inside.

PS: The Standards Board for England, the watchdog that polices councillors' behaviour, has begun an investigation into Monks's ward councillor on ENDC, wealthy businessman David Scott. The Tory's response to his constituent's plight after the council's vindictive prosecution was not to try and assist or defend him... but to offer to buy one or more of his pubs at a knock-down price "now that the figures are so down".

OH YEAH?

"World events and the threat of terrorism have made a new £25,000 secure door entry system at South Lakeland district council premises even more important, according to the authority."

– *Westmorland Gazette.*

EDUCASHUN NEWS

THE troubled Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), no doubt to help education secretary Charles Clarke head off claims that too much testing is stifling children's imaginations, has devised a package to make school "fun" and promote creativity.

After months of scouring the country for good practice, the QCA came across a play about football and magic, written by an inspired group of Key Stage 3, 13 and 14 year olds.

Alas, the little tykes didn't write the play in class when they should have been having fun but during lunchtime detention when they were supposedly being punished.

THE Eye confidently predicts that standards of primary school literacy are about to improve. We know because the teachers tell us so.

In previous years children taking Key Stage 2 writing tests were given a choice of four written assignments: usually a mix of stories or non-fiction to enable some personal expression or, er, "creativity".

But this year there were only two compulsory tasks and the longer one – complete with helpful pictures and prompts – set the exciting challenge of writing about being in a queue. The only opportunity to express an original thought came at the end.

The children found it very boring. But who cares? It'll enable a whole cohort of less able youngsters to score an improved level 4 – and that's what the government wants.

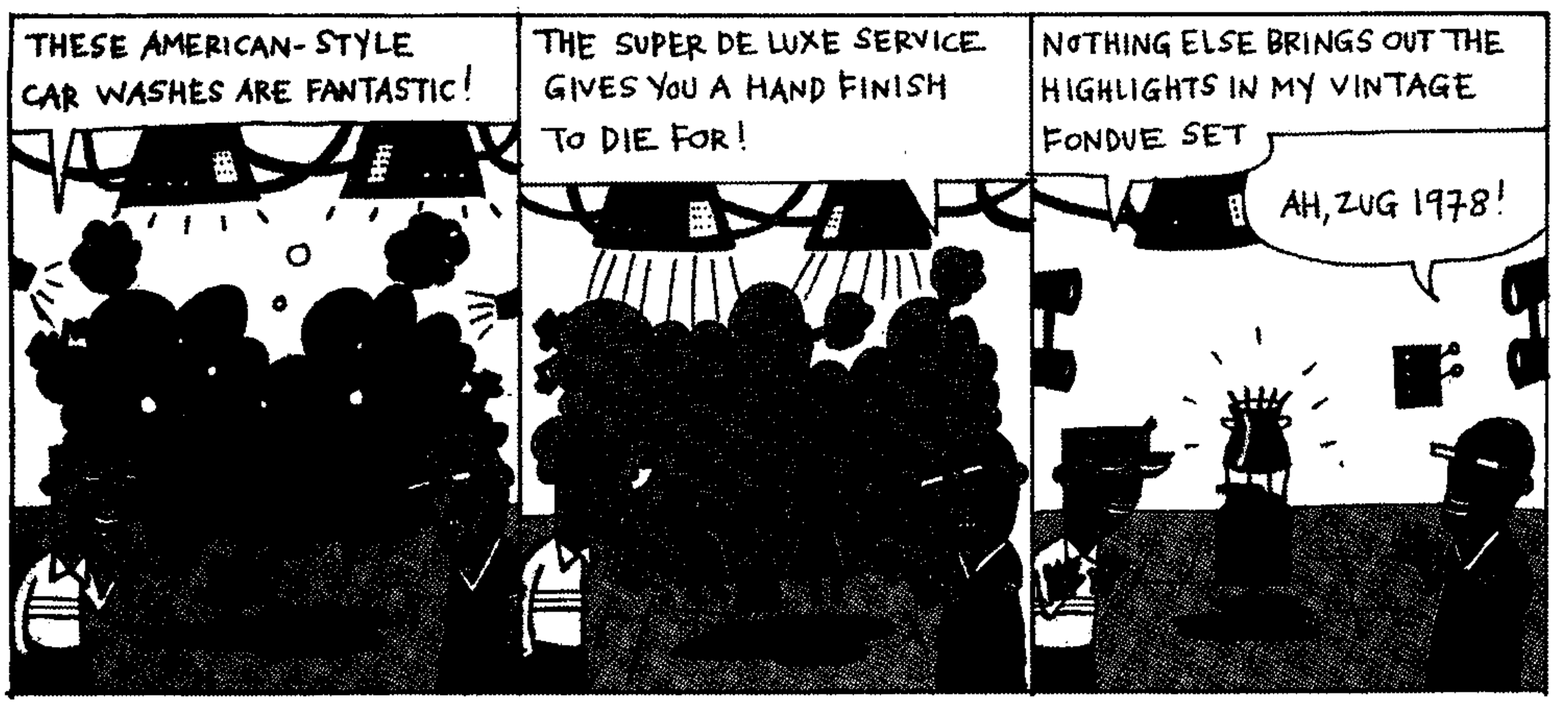
MORE on the Eye's favourite exam board Edexhell (sic), which has been swallowed up by education and newspaper publisher Pearson.

Pearson will own 75 percent of the new London Qualifications, allowing Edexcel Trust to remain as a not-for-profit charity. But not everyone is delighted. The Lib Dems worry about profit motives affecting the exam system and education experts highlight the many potential conflicts of interest.

A rival examiner, the Assessment and Qualification Alliance (AQA), says it is "not appropriate" to allow businesses to get mixed up in the exam process. And for once AQA can be holier-than-thou. It turned down an approach from Pearson in 2001, saying it didn't want a commercial company to control children's exams.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER


THESE AMERICAN-STYLE CAR WASHES ARE FANTASTIC!
THE SUPER DE LUXE SERVICE GIVES YOU A HAND FINISH TO DIE FOR!
NOTHING ELSE BRINGS OUT THE HIGHLIGHTS IN MY VINTAGE FONDUE SET
AH, ZUG 1978!

NOOKS and CORNERS

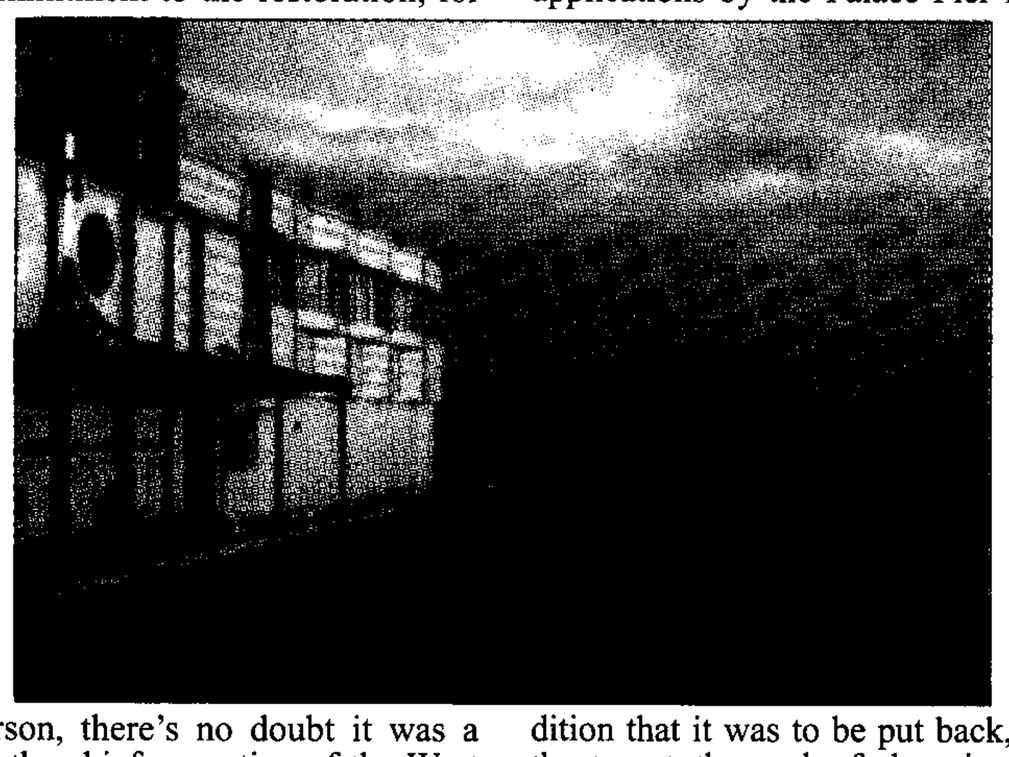
LIGHTNING may not strike twice in the same place, but fire certainly can. Well, in Brighton anyway.

First, part of the long-derelict West Pier at Brighton collapsed last December, jeopardising the ambitious and long-debated plans by the West Pier Trust to restore the grade I listed structure with the help of a £15m heritage lottery grant (*Eye* 1072).

Even so, in February Brighton & Hove council granted planning permission for the scheme which involves a new commercial development at the landward, Regency Square end of the pier. Soon after, the surviving timber structure of the West Pier went on fire, as they say in Glasgow.

The police seemed mystified as the remains of the pier cannot be reached from the shore. And then, on 10 May, fire broke out again leaving the remains of the West Pier a smouldering ruin as firemen were not allowed to tackle the blaze at close quarters.

This final conflagration may undermine English Heritage's commitment to the restoration, for although much of the iron structure would have had to be renewed anyway, if more than 90 percent of a listed building no longer exists, support for a restoration must be questioned. Eugenius Birch's masterpiece, closed in 1975 but a stalwart and much loved survivor, now seems doomed. "It's deliberate arson, there's no doubt it was a professional job," the chief executive of the West Pier Trust concluded. "I think they came in blackened dinghies from the seaward side, and started the fire in several parts. That's not what I'd call mindless vandalism." Yet the police seem strangely disinclined to investigate this murky business.



Now it is not for me to speculate on how these fires might have started, although I am sure they were not lit by members of the Save Our Seafront Group or the Regency Square Society or the other nimbyish societies opposed to the new development on the promenade. One fact, however, is evident to anyone who visits Brighton: the town can boast not one but two piers.

East of the West Pier, opposite the Steyne, is the Palace Pier. Originally projecting 1,760 feet into the English Channel, this was built in 1889-99 to replace the old chain pier, finally destroyed in a storm in 1896. Ostentatious, exotic and vulgar in the best seaside tradition, this other pier is now listed grade II despite sustaining damage from being hit by a barge in 1973.

The Palace Pier *[pictured]* has now been provocatively renamed "Brighton Pier" by its owners, the Noble Organisation, which is big in the amusement arcade business. This reflects the indisputable fact that Brighton's two piers were commercial rivals and would be again if both were open. In 2001, the Noble Organisation mounted a legal challenge to the West Pier Trust's plans for restoring and developing the West Pier, arguing that the lottery grant constituted unfair competition under European Union laws. This was rejected the following year, but then the Noble Organisation took its opposition to the European court of justice. "We are very sorry to hear about the fire," Mr David Biesterfield, director of the Noble Organisation, has announced. "We would not wish that upon anyone, but it doesn't alter our objections."

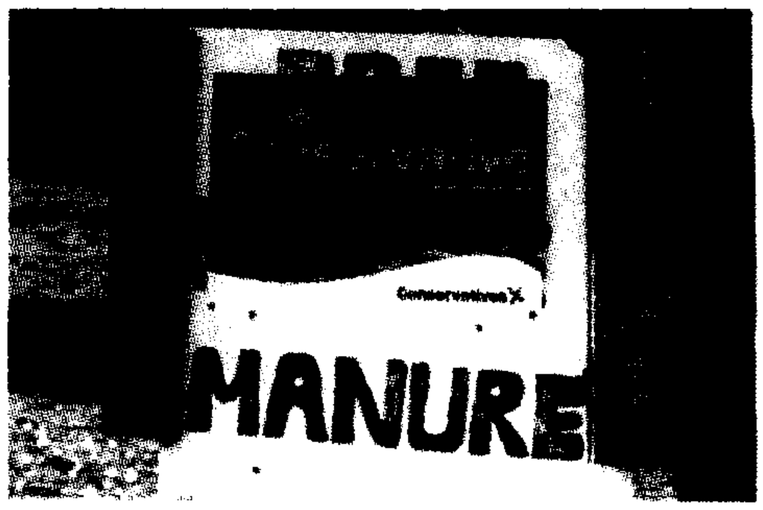
Mr Biesterfield has complained that "all applications by the Palace Pier for grant aid have been refused", noting that its preservation "as a listed building has been financed by private funding alone". This, however, is a curious claim to make, as the Palace Pier no longer looks as it did, or ought. The Noble Organisation acquired the Palace Pier in 1984. Two years later, on condition that it was to be put back, it dismantled the theatre at the end of the pier which had been damaged in the 1973 collision.

Now this was a glorious structure of cast-iron and timber designed by R. St George Moore. Enhanced by proud Oriental domes echoing those of the Prince Regent's Pavilion, it gave the end of the pier a necessary conclusion and climax. Naturally, the pieces of the theatre were carefully "stored prior to restoration" yet a boring and visually inadequate amusement and pleasure dome has risen instead while bits of the theatre, like the domes, are to be discovered all over Brighton.

If the West Pier really is to go, Brighton deserves at least one pier properly restored; so I trust the council and other concerned bodies will insist on this. And I look forward to Mr Biesterfield announcing long-overdue plans to fulfil legal obligations and rebuild the theatre at the end of the Palace Pier.

'Piloti'

I-SPY *Talaton, Devon*



Submitted by Nigel P. Ralph. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs.)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

FOR a successful banker ENO chairman Martin Smith has a haphazard grasp of figures – and it's even exhausted the ingenuity of his press office in trying to deal with the consequences.

During past weeks a cabal of accountants, Arts Council officials, union reps and journalists has been trying to establish the depth of ENO's economic crisis (no easy task given the prickly and aggressive personalities on both sides of the Coliseum's staff v. management dispute). It is now clear Smith has his sums wrong by a big margin.

Which is to say: yes, the Coli is in crisis; but no, its finances aren't so *appallingly* out of control as Smith originally insisted. Far from losing more than £1m a year in nine of the past 14 years as he's been saying, it was actually in surplus throughout most of the 1990s and the losses last year (the worst since 1997) amounted to about £600,000.

By any reckoning this isn't good. It may well justify the radical measures Smith has proposed to sort things out – and for all the mud his detractors throw at him, he's not a stupid or evil man: no doubt he has the Coliseum's interests at heart. But his position has been undermined by this failure of arithmetic and it looks weaker still for the desperate attempts of the ENO press office to cover his tracks by claiming he's been "misunderstood".

The only misunderstanding is Smith's own. As a respected banker with years of experience, his ability to interpret the financial history of his own organisation should be something the world can trust. Why else was he appointed chairman?

Cynics might suggest there was another reason, not unconnected with his personal pledge of £3m towards rebuilding the Coliseum. But last August, this column questioned whether that pledge had been honoured in its entirety and thought it probably hadn't. Since a recent balanced interview with Smith in the *Sunday Telegraph* referred to a gift of just £1m, followed by a downright supportive piece in the *Standard* that gave the same figure (written by Smith's friend and fellow board-member John Tusa), it looks as if this column was right.

But then Smith has always been a touch cavalier in his dealings with ENO. And hard to pin down. When his problems with the ENO chorus came to a head some weeks ago, during the intervening period between announcement and enactment of the chorus strike, Smith disappeared. It was assumed he was locked behind closed doors, deep in negotiation with the unions. In fact he was skiing.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Iphis. Hail, glorious Conqueror! much-lov'd Father, hail!
Behold, thy Daughter and her Virgin Train,
Come to falute thee with all duteous Love.

Scene III, Handel's Jephtha

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

What incredible publicity – and right outside Tate Modern!
Yeah, and being slagged off in all the papers – I don't envy the artist!
'BLOCKHEAD' UNVEILED
GIANT INFLATABLE SCULPTURE OF PINOCCHIO
'BLOCKHEAD' UN

Letters

Private Eye

A taxing read

Sir,

Congratulations to you and Paul Foot for all the work in producing your special report on the Inland Revenue/Mapeley tax scam. I will be sending in my tax return about the same time I would normally be disposing of this edition of the Eye. I think I might separate out your report and send it with the return, in case my tax inspector hasn't seen it already.

Yours sincerely,
CHRIS PADLEY,

Market Rasen, Lincolnshire.

Lookalike

McCartney

Milburn

Sir,

Separated at birth? Will Mr Alan Milburn have the same gift of the gab gene as Sir Paul to convince people that NHS Foundations Trusts are for public benefit?

Yours faithfully,
ELIZABETH MILLS,

Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffs.

Fog of war

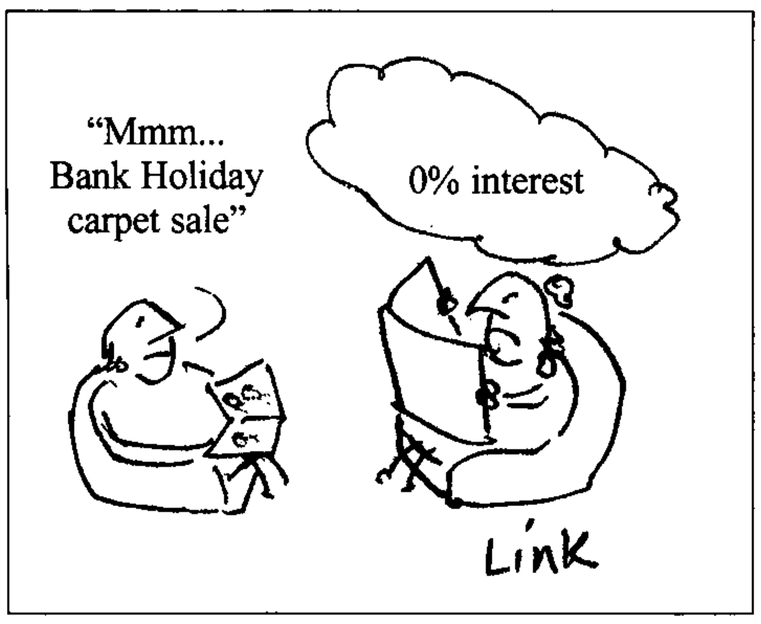
Sir,

Your dislike of Robert Fisk seems to be getting in the way of accuracy. The Street of Shame (Eye 1080) story concerning his amazing second dispatch on 2 April is an interesting one. Shame it's so inaccurate.

The paragraph with the cafes and the meat balls in the piece refers not to Musayyib – which, as you say, is not on the road from Baghdad to Hillah – but to Iskandariyah, which is and which was not, I assume, occupied by the Americans (not having any bridges to speak of). Maybe the other hacks could have filed something similar if, instead of bitching, they had bothered to look out of the bus window on the way through Iskandariyah.

Yours faithfully,
JONATHAN KAYE,

Girona, Catalonia (Spain).



Cock and Kabul

Sir,

Why didn't you check the claims from your tipster before trying to rubbish our award-winning story about Zarmina, the Afghan mother executed in Kabul stadium by the Taliban (Eye 1080)?

These are the facts:

The Mirror's photograph of Zarmina was supplied to us from her police file by Rana Saeed, the woman police officer who was in charge of Zarmina's case and who interviewed her after her arrest. She told us it was of Zarmina. She had no reason to lie.

The photograph was positively confirmed to be of Zarmina by her brother-in-law, her sister-in-law, her eldest daughter, her two brothers and the female prison warden who befriended Zarmina and accompanied her to the stadium on the day she died. We know this. We showed the picture to each of them. They had no reason to lie.

While in Kabul we also examined Zarmina's court file. It had no photograph. It did, however, contain Zarmina's death warrant, signed by Mullah Omar himself. It is surprising, if the TV crew saw this file, that they somehow missed the death warrant.

Why, you might ask, has the accusation been made now, some 11 months after we published it, that the photograph was not in fact of Zarmina? Simple. Because we won an award. It's known as sour grapes.

Yours,
ANTON ANTONOWICZ &
PHIL SPENCER,

The Daily Mirror.

Allergic reaction

Sir,

Muckspreader's explanation of the economics of oil seed rape production came as a revelation to this particular family of long-term hay-fever sufferers. Presumably the same analysis would also be true for the fields of linseed/flax which intersperse the yellow rashes with swathes of pale blue.

Farmers often like to refer to themselves and their efforts as the farming "industry". So how about if we apply the same sort of thinking and the same sort of rules by which the rest of real "industry" has to abide? If fields were factories, and those factories were emitting vast amounts of noxious substances, the health and safety executive would close them without compunction. Yet farms seem able, without a murmur from the HSE, to disgorge clouds of invisible pollen causing often severe distress to thousands, and indeed, serious health risks to a highly susceptible few.

If pollen is not covered by the COSHH regulations, it's about time it was.

Yours faithfully,
BRYN GLOVER,

Cracoe, North Yorks.

CABE man

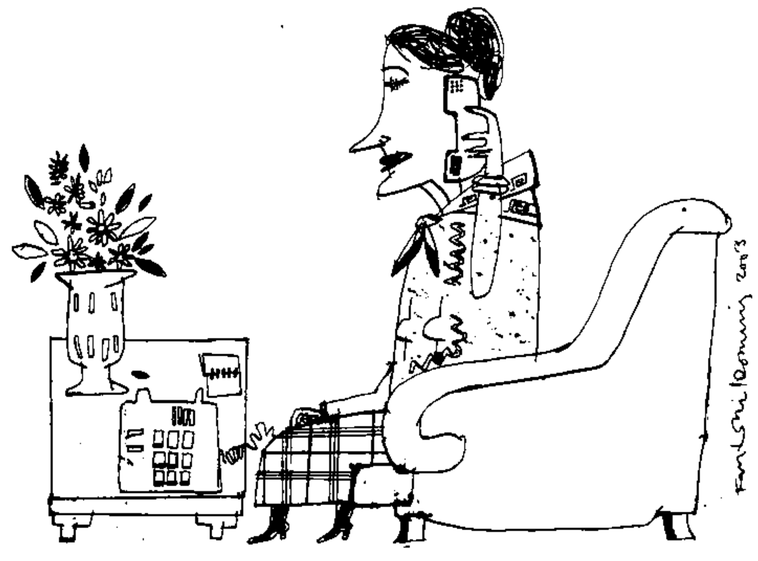
Sir,

Piloti seems not to like the role of CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) in offering advice to the secretary of state on English Heritage's recommendations for listing post-war buildings (Nooks & Corners, 1080). CABE carries out this function at the request of the department for culture, media and sport. Given our remit, I should have thought our views would be worth taking into account whether or not we have a "serious claim to expertise in historic buildings"; but your readers might like to know that the CABE steering group which considers these cases includes one commissioner who is also a commissioner of English Heritage, and another who is a former director of EH's London region.

Sincerely,
PETER STEWART,

Head of Design Review, CABE.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Can you put me back on hold? I was really enjoying the music"

Fuel what a scorcher

Sir,

I hate to point this out, but Muckspreader's sly dig at bio-fuel is a teeny bit ridiculous. "It takes more energy to make the fuel than the fuel itself generates." Erm, yes, it does. If Muckspreader knows any fuel that doesn't, he'd be well advised to patent it immediately, as well as submit the formula to the people at Nobel. No energy storage device can be 100 percent efficient.

Disproving the fundamental laws of the universe is best left to the professionals.

Yours thermodynamically,
CHRIS WILLIAMS,

Via email.

Destination Oxford

Sir,

I am no defender of Sir Richard Branson's train service, but it is inaccurate to assert "Virgin Trains don't go to Oxford". (Signal Failures, 1079.)

It would probably be wise then, not tell this to the driver of, say, the 12:40 from Newcastle Central to Southampton Central, as he/she would be mighty perplexed when the train pulled into Oxford at 17:18. (Assuming the service is running to time, of course.)

The train operator? Virgin Trains.

Yours,
BRIAN D. ELSEY,

Sheffield.

Left is right

Sir,

Re: Cartoon in Eye 1080. Why has the normally left-handed Paul McCartney changed hands to play on the Underground?

I think we should be told.

Yours with nothing better to do,
ANDY HARGREAVES,

Shirley, Southampton.

LUVVIES

"[The role of Neo] has given me so much. As an actor, as a performer, in my life, the challenges that it had, the people that I got to work with – it was beautiful."

KEANU REEVES on his roles in The Matrix sequels
news.bbc.co.uk

Submitted by Debbie White.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Clue less?

Sir,

Reluctant as I am to continue the great Cyclops Cross-Words debate, can I suggest to Eleanor and Michael Wasley (Eye 1080) that they restrict themselves to the numerous smut-free cryptic puzzles in other newspapers, and allow us otherwise responsible grown-up Eye readers our fortnightly dose of adolescent innuendo.

By the way, I wonder if Cyclops could write a suitable clue for Eleanor and Michael's home town? Scunthorpe... Fnarr.

Yours up,
ED GIGGLER,

Via email.

French letters

Sir,

While the discussion over the use of the word balcony to mean bosom may present interesting features, I am afraid that George Bird's reference to the description of Lady Conyngham (Eye 1079) does not advance the argument that the word was thus used in English in the early 19th century. The quotation he offers us is to be found verbatim in Peter Quennell's delightful edition of the letters of Princess Dorothea Lieven to Prince Metternich (documents which came to light only in 1936). The letter in question is that of 23rd December 1821 and it, like all the others, was of course written in French!

M.D. THOMAS,

Swansea.

LUVVIES

"After Hear'Say, I lost my hope and my belief. During my despair I didn't wash my hair for a week."

Actress (and former Hear'Say singer)
SUZANNE SHAW
Daily Mirror

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Rambling on

Sir,

Mr Lee should stop wriggling (1080). He attacked public rights in the countryside on the ground that they lead to trespass, vandalism, invasion of privacy, etc. He now claims to have no quarrel with people who stick to public paths and behave themselves. So why drag the delinquents into the argument – except to smear all public access?

KATE ASHBROOK,

General Secretary, The Open Spaces Society, Henley-on-Thames.

Doorstep encounter

Sir,

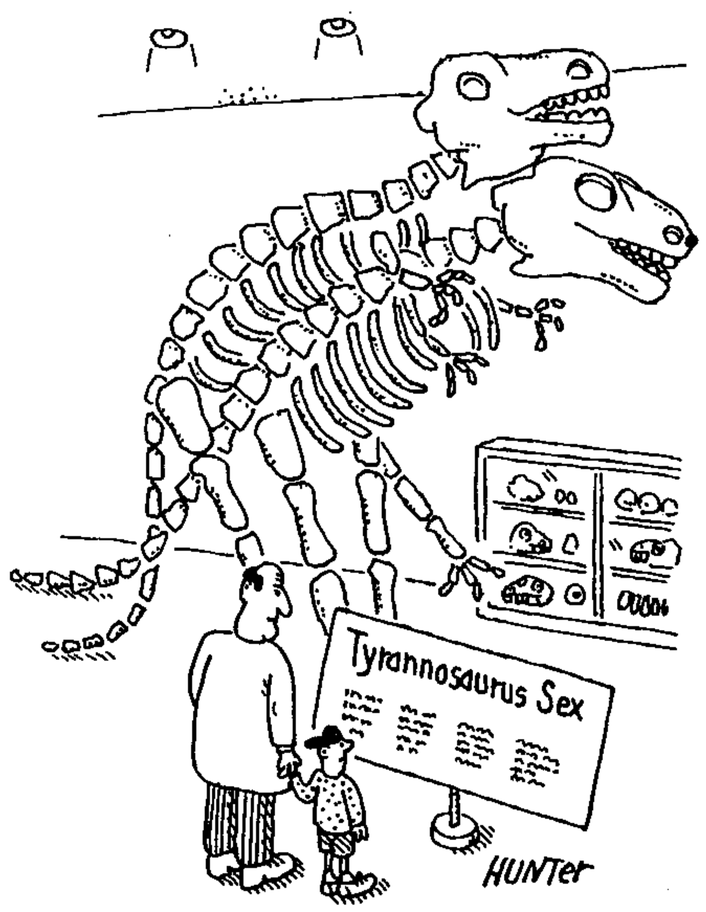
I can leap with a single bound to the rescue of Raymond Ffoulkes (Eye 1080) with regards to incidents involving "exacting a terrible revenge" against pint-sized maggots who ply the ancient street art of "Lighting a Shite" in Scotland.

*I was once returning home after a lunchtime's refreshment (this was about 1974, I guess) to my terraced hovel in Motherwell (I am now a retired vegetable living in Eastbourne) to discover a wee laddie of no more than 12 hammering on my door with the shite already alight on my doormat. His accomplice, who was even younger, clocked me and was away like Ben Johnson on gear, which freed me up to wound the main perpetrator mercilessly by means of the Doc Martens I was wearing before inviting him to do with the now extinguished shite what Phil Tufnell would have readily done without similar persuasion. It was possibly a singular case of beating the shit **into** someone.*

You could get away with things like that in 1974, by the way.

Yours still in the pink,
GEORGE MACRAE,

Eastbourne, E. Sussex.



Drug abuse

Sir,

Angiotensin II inhibitors are not currently used to treat alopecia and psoriasis. Well, not in my pharmacy. Losartan, Candesartan, Irbsesartan, etc are normally used to treat hypertension or heart-failure.

I suppose you could rub them on your head, but personally I would stick to Regaine.

Regards,
ROBERT PETTIFER,

Via email.

THE EARLY YEARS:
NIGELLA LAWSON
SALT, MUSTARD, VINEGAR, PEPPER — THERE YOU HAVE IT, THE BASE OF A SCRUMMY BENIHANA SALAD DRESSING.
GEOFF THOMPSON.

Minor error

Sir,

Quin may be right (It's Grim Up North London, Eye 1080) to say that "Streets of London" in the key of D loses its resonance. But in D minor, it also loses its tune. It's in the major key.

Sorry to be so boring about this, perhaps I should get out more.

Regards,
KATE ROBERTS,

Via email.

Geddit?

Sir,

"Streets of London" certainly loses all its resonance if played in D minor (It's Grim Up North London, 1080), as it should be played in a major key.

To get the full emotion from the song, I would propose that it's played in A Flat and not in the underground.

Yours sincerely,
TONY DEEGAN,

Voghera, Italy.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"The former Archbishop resigned following criticism of his handling of a convicted paedophile priest."
Radio 4
(Tony McGowan)

"Barry Legg has a foot in all three camps..."
Radio 4
(Harriet Lyall)

"Bristol City will be attacking their fans in the second half."
GEORGE GAVIN, Sky Sports
(Stephen Hardwick)

"You've taken the wind right out of my mouth."
RAY STUBBS, BBC
(Brian Blacker)

Matthew Bannister: *Were you rooting for Celtic?*
Guest MP: *No, but that's not because I wasn't rooting for Celtic.*
Radio 5 Live
(James Holleyhead)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

Letter from **Lagos**
from Our Own Correspondent

NIGERIAN politics are still in turmoil following the three elections in April which gave us a new assembly, senate and governorships but kept almost all the same people in almost all the jobs.

President Obasanjo, a retired military ruler from the 1970s, and his deputy Atiku Abubakar, a former customs chief of legendary wealth, won a thumping majority despite spiralling corruption, economic decay and mounting tribal and religious passions that saw thousands killed in clashes during their first term. The opposition said the election had been fraudulent "on a scale that has never been witnessed in the history of criminality in Nigeria". As we say, it's not who votes that counts but who counts the votes.

Thus Obasanjo is back and his People's Democratic Party (PDP) party has swept up most of our 36 state governorships. Various lawsuits and claims have been made to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) about fraud but no one believes anything much will change.

Instead everybody is jockeying for position. Because political jobs are divided by "zones" to effect ethnic balance, the senate presidency is reserved for the south-east. Additionally the legislatures have agreed there will be a strict seniority system, ensuring that only those with at least three years' experience in the legislatures are eligible for high office. This means the senate presidency is reduced to a choice of senators Arthur Nzeribe, Ifeanyi Ararume and Fidelis Okoro, all known rogues.

Nzeribe, the prime contender, was the subject of an investigation by the security services into his business interests. The report said that "due to his alleged dubious activities, all the countries mentioned except Chad in which he was a non-resident expelled him". No doubt Nzeribe will make a fine senate president.

Meanwhile a former police chief says two thirds of our governors have criminal records. The reelected governor of Delta State, James Ibori, is fighting efforts to have him barred from office as a result of a conviction which came to light before the campaign. His defence is that he confessed the crime and paid a fine but wasn't technically found guilty. The supreme court has ruled that he can go ahead with his inauguration on the 29th. In a show of discipline and unity, the request for an order to stop the governor's inauguration was made by two members of the governor's *own party* in Delta, Messrs Goodnews Agbi and Anthony Alabi. More than 20 people were killed in the run-up to the elections in Delta, the centre of the nation's oil riches and permanently volatile. Now that foreign observers have gone, we expect the army to dispense justice to these troublesome communities who demand a share of the wealth pumped from their environmentally devastated land.

There is also trouble brewing at the centre, where our two leading citizens loathe one another. Obasanjo needed Atiku's muscle and political wheeler dealing to get back into power. But he distrusts his deputy with a passion. He handled most of the economic business of the state during the last Obasanjo-Atiku regime, especially privatisation. It was a rewarding experience for him, if not for the nation.

For good measure the attorney-general and minister of justice, chief Godwin Kanu Agabi, has asked a federal high court in Abuja to order the arrest of the leaders of the national assembly for passing the amended anti-corrupt bill into law. Agabi also pleaded that they should be imprisoned for contempt.

The only sensible one these days is Tony Annenih, a thuggish former police chief but presidential favourite who enjoyed the public works ministry in the last government – one of our most profitable ministries. Annenih has refused all job offers. He is waiting to see how the land lies in June.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"Once men get past their mid-thirties, their metabolism slows down rapidly," Dr Shukan Tokuho told a press conference in Tokyo, "and subcutaneous fat increases in the body, resulting in middle-aged spread. Exercise is the best way to reduce it, but busy salarymen are tied to their desks all day, and don't have time to go to the gym. So I had them in mind when I invented my simpler way to a slimmer physique, the masturbation diet."

Earlier, Dr Tokuho had astonished reporters with details of his unusual weight-loss programme. "The three main advantages of this regimen are that it's quick, easy, and good for health. Five minutes of vigorous masturbation can consume 300 calories, which is the equivalent of sprinting 100 metres. It can be done while sitting at your desk, and the experience is so refreshing that it can replace a light meal, thereby saving more calories. The ideal position is leaning back in a chair, with the heels raised about 10 centimetres off the floor, because this puts tension on the stomach muscles. Performed in this way, masturbation is as strenuous as doing push-ups or sit-ups in a sauna, and can trim 8 centimetres off the waist if performed twice a day for a month, as part of a calorie-controlled diet.

"Best of all, my method is far safer than sexual intercourse, because there are no worries about diseases or unwanted pregnancies. I'd recommend it to any office worker who is worried about his weight, and my plan is neatly summed up in one simple slogan: shake for breakfast, shake for lunch, and a sensible dinner." *(Mainichi Daily News, 29/4/2003. Spotter: David Dallison)*

— o —

o *"Dear Auntie Tita – Please help me. I fell madly in love with my wife the first time I saw her at a party. She was the prettiest woman there. I courted her immediately, and when she accepted me, I thought I was in heaven. Our wedding was so romantic, and I had tears in my eyes and was so proud as my bride walked down the aisle. But now, after five kids, my wife has become careless about her habits. She farts and belches all the time.*

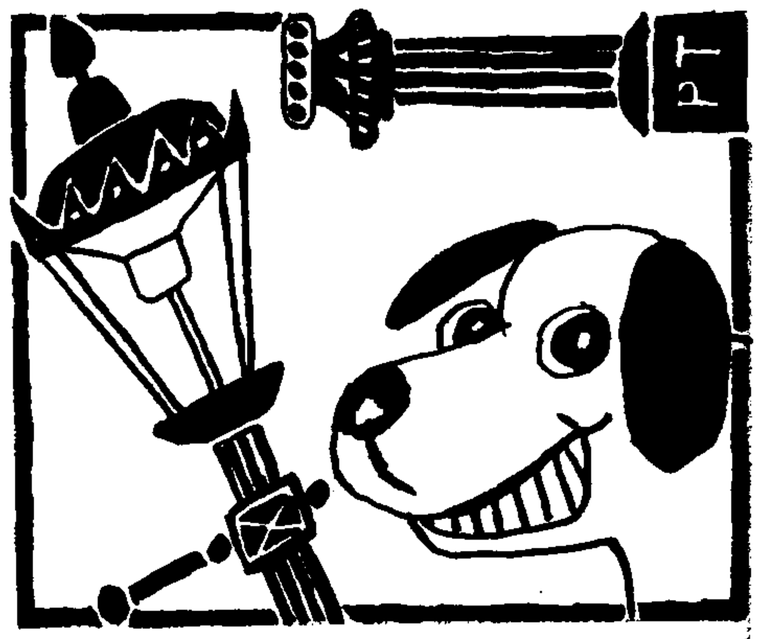
"She also picks her nose and plucks her facial hair while watching television with me. But the thing that bothers me most is the sight of her false teeth in a glass at the side of our bed. I've tried to tell her about their effect on me, but she just laughs. Sometimes, I have nightmares about her false teeth attacking me and devouring my genitals, which is enough to jolt me awake. I cannot imagine that this is the beautiful lady I fell in love with. Please help me. Yours truly, Suffering Husband."

"Dear Suffering Husband – I hope all wives will read your letter. Believe me, you are not alone. I suggest you have a heart-to-heart talk with her, assuring her of your love while coming to a compromise on the 'false teeth on the side table' issue. The most important thing to remember is that nobody's perfect. Even you might have some irritating habits which she has to put up with too. Do you never fart? I know I do. Yours truly, Auntie Tita." (Visayan Daily Star [Philippines], 30/4/2003. Spotter: Robert Harland)

— o —

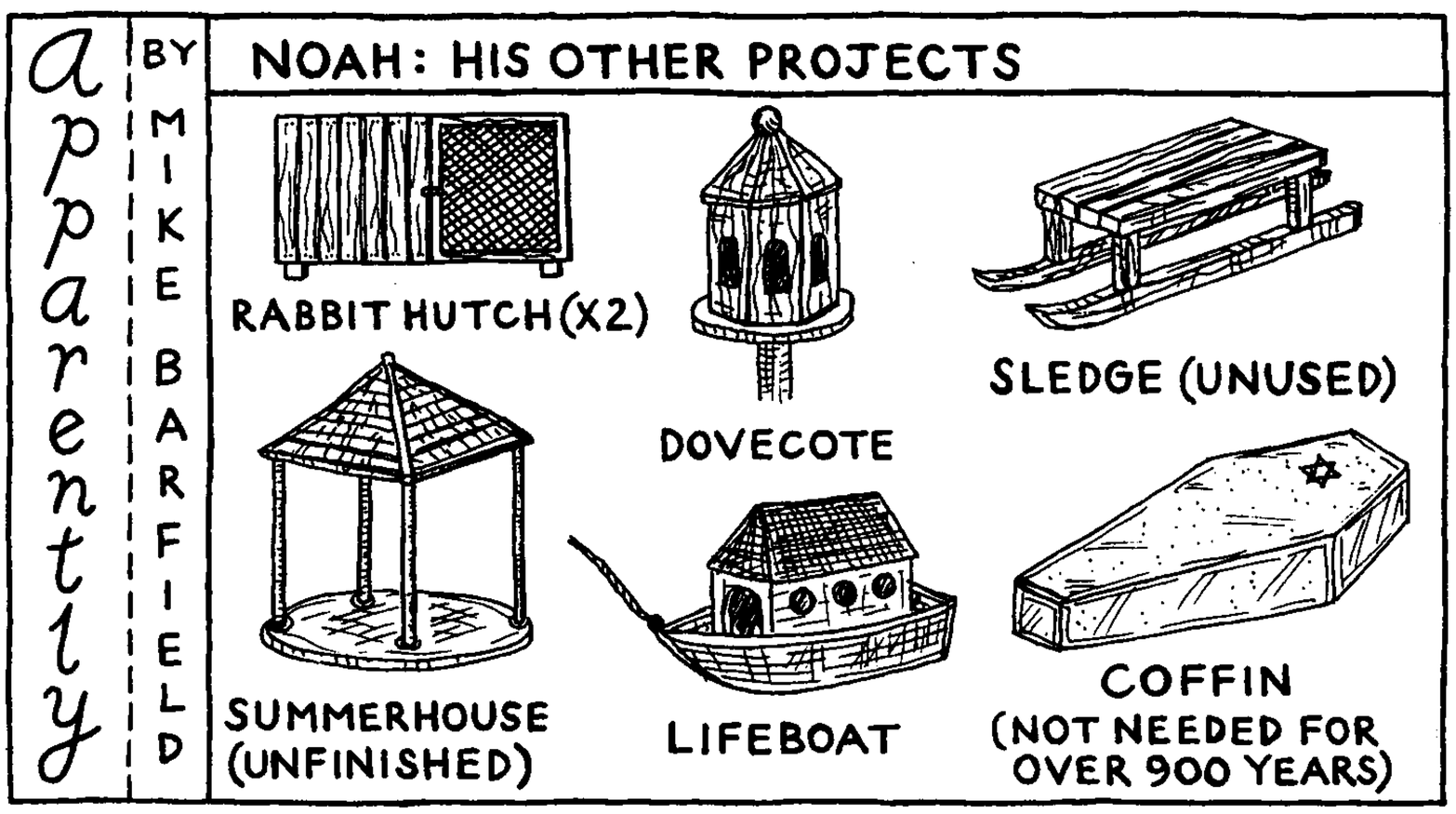
o "This may sound light hearted, but it can cause serious problems," Councillor Walter Burrows told reporters in Derbyshire. "Dog urine is one of the most corrosive substances known to man, packed with salt and acid, and years of repeated urination can damage the base of lamppost columns. That's why we need to spend this money now, before the posts start collapsing, which would be a serious risk to public safety."

Councillor Burrows (the cabinet member for environment and highways) was defending the decision of Derbyshire County Council to spend £75,000 on a risk assessment of their 90,000 street lights. "In recent years, there have been lamppost collapses in Gateshead and Westminster, most probably caused by dog urine, and we need to ensure that none of the



lampposts in Derbyshire pose any danger to public safety. Once we have the results of the survey, we will be able to plan how much money we need to spend on maintenance and replacement work, to combat the threat of dog urine."

Recent research from the University of Zagreb has also identified dog urine as the cause of a spate of collapsing lampposts in Croatia. The ammonia left by male dogs when marking their territory is blamed for corroding the base of lampposts to the point that they often fall down within a few years of erection. *(Derbyshire County Council News, 8/4/2003. Spotter: Anon)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Bonjour (only kidding, Gordon!),

I am sure that all of you will by now have had time to read the 150,000 page report circulated to members of the PCC by our Treasurer Mr Brown, with its snappy title *'638 Reasons Why We Should All Think Very Carefully ABout Whether Or Not To Take The Collection In Euros'*.

Let me say at once what an excellent piece of work it is, and how grateful we should all be for the huge amount of work that Gordon and his helpers *(special thanks to Mr Balls for his valiant work on the photocopier!)* have put in to make this very important subject so easy to understand and accessible to all the parish team!

I have not yet had time to read every word of Gordon's masterpiece(!), but I am planning to take it with me on our family holiday to France this year, and I really look forward to sitting by the pool and getting my head round Gordon's brilliant analysis!

Anyone who has read this far will know that, contrary to some pretty wild rumours which have been lately flying round the parish, there is **absolutely no disagreement between me and Gordon whatsoever!**

As for the unkind suggestions that our Treasurer is a bit of an "anorak" and a "trainspotter", who does nothing but sit up all night with his calculator, worrying obsessively about rows of figures, all I can say is that we should consider ourselves lucky to have such a dedicated parish servant prepared to take on the humdrum

but very necessary task of making sure that the figures add up! *(Not that they always do add up, do they, Gordon!)*

But isn't it true that all of us in this life are either a Martha or a Mary?

Do you remember the Bible story, children? Martha, the drudge, busy in the background, doing all the work with the broom and her calculator.

Mary, the clever, attractive, popular one, having the time to think things through and have all the good ideas.

Yet both of them in the end were indispensable (even though one was obviously more so than the other!).

So they made a great team. And that parable is still just as true today as it was all those thousands of years ago in a certain book even longer than Mr Brown's brilliant guide to our *'Church Collection; Preferred Currency Options'*!

Who knows whether, some time in the future, people will say, "Are you a Gordon or a Tony?"

Yours

Tony

PARISH DEMOCRACY ✗ SPECIAL ✓

Your Chance To Vote On Why You Don't Want A Referendum

Yes I think referendums are a waste of time and we should let the Vicar decide.

No I don't believe in referendums and we should let the Vicar decide.

Send your vote now to Mr Alastair Campbell, c/o The Vicarage.

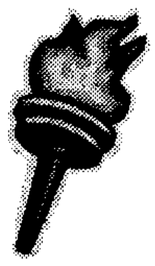
Meetings

● The advertised talk by Mrs Short on 'The Vicar's Place In History' has been cancelled.

Alas, after her recent strange conduct, it certainly does not look as though there will be much of a place in history for Clare!

We are very grateful to Mr Blunkett, chairman of our Neighbourhood Watch, who has kindly insisted on stepping in at short notice to treat us again to his popular talk on 'Why judges should be strung up, as it is the only language they understand'. Tea and dog biscuits provided. Parish Hall, Wednesday 8.30pm.

St Albion's Olympic Bid



Mrs Jowell writes:

The Vicar has asked me to take charge of Parish arrangements for our 2012 Olympic celebrations. This is a very exciting opportunity for St Albion's to demonstrate that it is a world-class parish, fit to hold up its head alongside Athens and Bloemfontein!

Just look at what St Albion's has to offer already:

★ extensive pre-existing infrastructure, including ring-road, traffic lights and bus shelters

★ world-class transport network, including bus service (weekdays only) and easy access to Albion Parkway railway station

★ world-ranking indoor facility (Millennium Tent), almost unused, suitable for badminton, ping-pong, synchronised ballroom dancing and 100 metres media studies. (Is this right, Mr Clarke?)

★ international-standard leisure and Plaice 'n' Chips takeaway, Mr Desmond's Adult Mags and Vids Centre (behind fish shop in the alley) and Mr Sainsbury's exciting new GM Superstore (this week's offer: soya-flavoured raspberry fish fingers).

But all this will pale into insignificance alongside the incredible new top-flight athletics arena and velodrome which we are hoping to build on the waste ground behind the parish hall (subject to planning permission). This will be St Albion's chance to tranform the site of our disused chemical and biological weapons factory into an expression of our desire for international solidarity and world peace.

To launch the St Albion's bid to host the world's most prestigious sporting event, all we need is £10 billion, which we plan to raise by a series of suitable fund-raising events involving everyone in the parish.

These will include:

Special Olympic Jumble Sale
Grand Olympic Raffle
Guess The Weight Of Mr Prescott
Throw A Sponge At Mr Clarke
Throw A Brick At Mrs Short

Plus:

Local Badgerwatch With Mr Ron Davies.

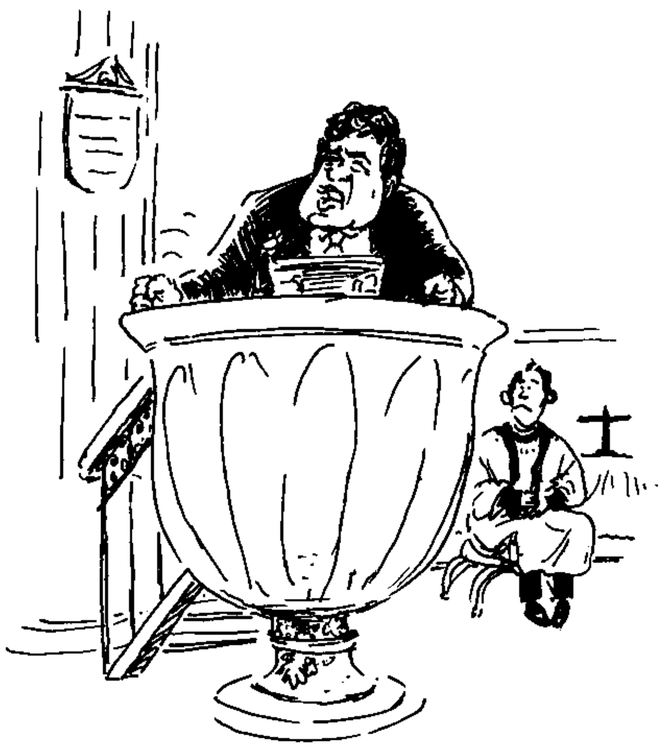
So look out New York and Paris!!!! We're on our way!!!

And don't forget our secret weapon – only St Albion's has the world's most popular and successful Vicar!!!

Daily Mail
FRIDAY, MAY 30, 2003
NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

A Special Notice From Our Former Churchwarden Mr Mandelson, the sole proprietor of the Handy Mandy Agency ('All Leaks Taken Care Of')

I would like to make it clear that my recent comments on the desirability of our church collections being taken in euros were an expression of my own personal point of view and were in no way authorised by the Vicar. I would like to remind everyone that I hold no official position of any kind in the parish and that I have no contact with the Vicar, above and beyond our regular daily conversations on the telephone – as he asked me to explain to your readers. P.M.



The parish treasurer denied that he wanted to upstage the vicar last week. By local artist Mr de la Nougerede.

Apologies

Sorry to all the parishioners who could not get into the church service on Sunday due to the new 20ft concrete wall around the perimeter. As you know there has been a nasty threat of terrorist action against the vicar and I am sure you agree that it is vital that we protect him and the other members of the PCC at all costs, i.e. £30 million. Services will be relayed by Tannoy to those outside, so *do* come in spite of the small risk that you might be blown up. At least you will be happy to know that your team ministry is secure inside. T.B.

Valete

● Goodbye to my partner Fiona Millar who has served the vicar's wife *extremely well* under difficult circumstances, in particular coping with the interference of Mrs Blair's so-called lifestyle guru, Ms Carole Caplin.

It is not my position to say that Ms Caplin is a witch who has used black magic to insinuate herself into the vicar's home and corrupted the whole Blair family with her brainwashing techniques.

However one cannot help agree with this analysis since it is so obviously true. A.C.

Editors note: All material in praise of Fiona Millar will be reproduced in full on the grounds that it will embarrass the vicar. A.C.

NUL POINTS EUROVISION DISASTER COULD LEAD TO FALL IN HOUSE PRICES

By Our Woman In Latvia
Diana Riga

BRITAIN's home-owners sat watching their televisions in horror over the weekend, as the UK's entry to the Eurovision Song Contest failed to get a single point.

With each vote cast against Britain, the euro rallied against the pound on the currency markets, destabilising the whole UK economy and leading to what is believed to be an outbreak of SARS in key property hot spots.

Cry Baby

One distressed houseowner, Mr Madeupname, told the Daily Mail "on Saturday night my 8-bedroomed Wimbledon semi was worth £2 million. On Sunday Morning I couldn't give it away". "Nul points means nul points," he concluded conveniently and *(cont. p. 94)*

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S BIG SISTER!!! (GEDDIT???!!)

■ SEE the Eurovision Song Contest??!? What a scandal??!?? How dare these tin-pot foreigners in Latvia sit in judgement over the cream of Britain's pop songsters, ie Jemini singing 'Cry Baby'?!!!? Let's face it, this song was penned by none other genius than the Head of Sir Paul McCartney's fabulous Fame Academy!!?! For crying out loud – that must be worth a million points!!!? Talk about a Riga-ed vote!!!?! Geddit???!?

■ CRY BABY?!?!? I'll tell you why we're crying, baby (Geddit???!) – because Jemini's song was the worst song ever written ever by anyone??!? And no wonder, since it was written by none other than the Head of Sir Paul McCartney's rotten old Fame Academy!?!?! Shame Academy more like it!!?!! Bring back Sir Cliff and Boom-Bang-A-Bang – now that's what I call music (Geddit???!!)

■ TURKEY – what a dump!!?! Who has ever heard of any music coming out from that bunch of raggy-arsed belly dancers!!?! And their winning song???! Talk about a Turkey!!?! Geddit!!!?? Bring back Buck's Fizz and let's have a proper British winner??!? It's time we brought glory home to this nation of song-writing colossi, such as Sir Paul McCartney and his brilliant friend who runs the Fame Academy!??!? All together now: Congratulations??!?? And Celebrations??!??

■ So Prince William is 21!! So what???! Who isn't??!!

■ HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's Big Brothers (Geddit???!?)

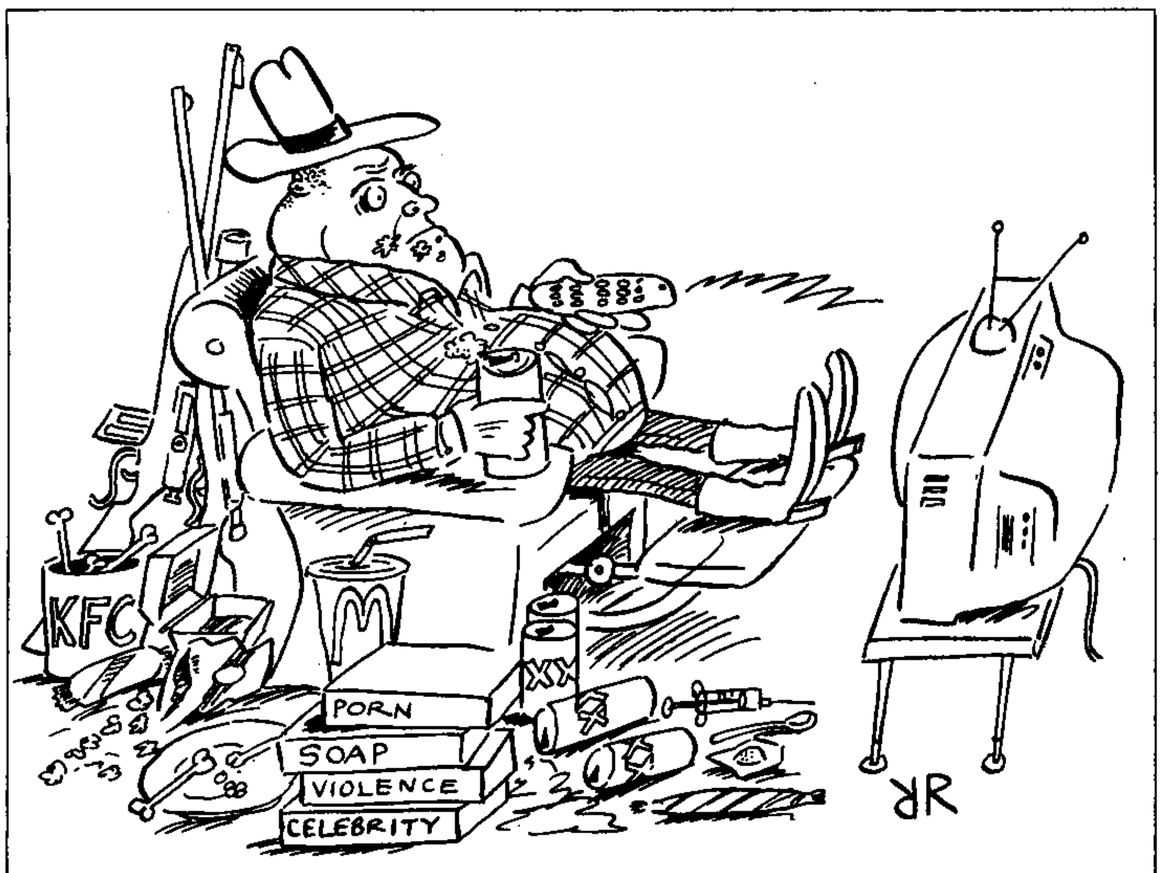
● **Colonel Tim Collins** – Okay, so he likes to play it rough – don't we all!?!? Geddit???!?

● **Wayne Rooney** – He's seventeen-years-old but he can score from any position!!!?? Sounds good to me??!?? Mmm, is it bedtime yet???

● **The Bloke From Jemini** – Crazy name, crazy choice!!!???

Byeeee!!!

EURO SHOCK



How The West Was Lost

ROYAL POETRY CORNER

That Queen's Ode in Full

Lines on the departure of Her Majesty the Queen from Castle Mae in 1997

So. Farewell
Then
Castle Mey.

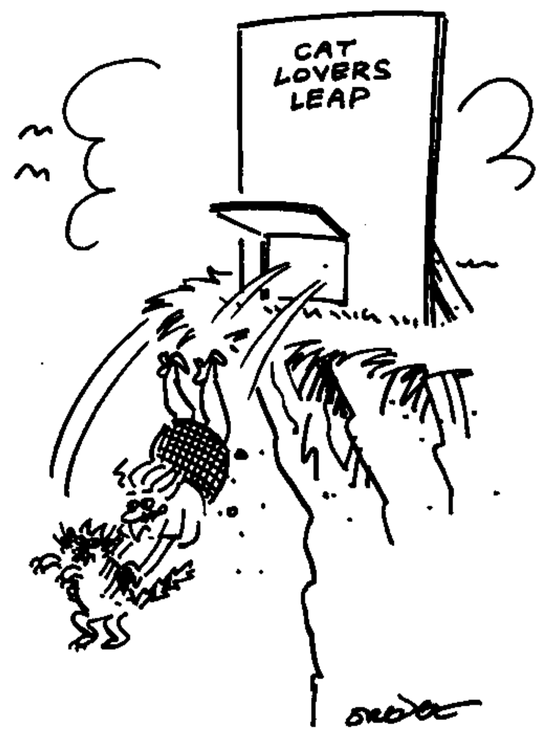
With your delicious
Dinner
And your footmen
So gay.

As Queen, I
Don't often
Write in
Verse.

But I saw
Andrew Motion's
Last effort.

And thought
I couldn't do.
Much worse.

E.R. Thribb (71½)



SOLDIERS 'QUITE VIOLENT' SHOCK

THERE was shock and outrage today after it was revealed that soldiers are quite violent.

"We all thought they were Francis of Assisi in a beret," said everyone...

On Other Pages

- Models 'quite pretty' shock **7**
- Athletes 'quite fit' shock **18**
- Pope quite Catholic **28**

Exclusive To All Papers

AN APOLOGY

IN RECENT MONTHS we may have given the mistaken impression that Home Office statistics prove beyond a shadow of doubt that asylum seekers are completely out of control. The Home Office's inability to reduce these figures proves that a Labour Government has failed to get to grips with an asylum system that has broken down irrevocably.

We now realise, in the light of new figures showing that the number of asylum applications is falling, that nothing could be further from the truth. The asylum statistics prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that immigration officials are completely out of control and are deliberately fiddling the true number of bogus refugees. The Home Office's ability to reduce these figures shows that a Labour Government has failed to get to grips with an asylum system that has broken down irrevocably.

We apologise for any confusion caused, and any confusion in the future when the next time the number of asylum seekers goes up we leap on these figures as proof that Britain really is a soft touch for... etc, etc, etc.

CHURCH OF ENGLAND TO ACCEPT HETEROSEXUALS

by Our Religious Affairs Staff **Phil Pews**

THE Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, faced fierce opposition from traditionalists when he announced yesterday that he would bless "heterosexual marriages".

A furious Bishop of Bath and Sauna said, "He is throwing away centuries of the church's history by pandering to a tiny minority of so-called 'straights'."

The Straight and Narrow-minded

The Archbishop, however, was unrepentant. "We have to face the fact that in the twenty-first century there are a few people who are not homosexual and enjoy fulfilling relationships with members of the opposite sex." He continued, "We have to embrace them even if the thought of it is frankly rather unpleasant."

Dr Rowan Atkinson is currently appearing in the hit comedy film 'Mr Beard'.

Why I Am Not William Deedes

by William Boot

Extracts from "Shurely Shome Mishtake – the Real Shtory of Shcoop" by William F. Boot.

I FIRST met Bill Deedes in Abyssinia just before the Coronation of Haile Satirical, the Ethiopian Potentate, in the summer of 1827. I was sharing a tent in the middle of the desert with the legendary American correspondent, J.J. Knickerbocker-Glory III, known to his intimates as "Johnny" Trouserpress.

We were drinking Pimms and discussing England's chances of winning the Test when in walked this extraordinary figure wearing a three-piece suit, a top hat and spats. "Good evening," he said in the manner that was to become familiar to millions of readers when he was immortalised in the novel "Mr Deedes Goes to the Daily Telegraph".

Deedes must have been at least 94, but he had the agility of mind of a man of 107.

TOMORROW: *Why I am not Evelyn Waugh.*

That Camilla Dinner for Her Majesty the Queen

Menu In Full

Coronation Chicken

— ❋ —

That's it

BUGGER

Chicken Bugger	65
Pork Burger	65
Buff Burger	60
Vegetable Burger	60
Cheese Burger	70

Menu, Kathmandu, Nepal

Nursery Times

30 May 2003

TARTS RETURNED TO KNAVE OF HEARTS

BY OUR COURT STAFF ROB ROYALS

THE controversial Royal Knave, Mr Paul Butler, said last night that he was "delighted" to be given back his cherished tarts which were, he said, "gifts" from the late Queen of Hearts.

Police had arrived at Mr Butler's home in a carriage filled with tarts which had been in their custody for the duration of the case of the *Knave vs. Regina Cordarum*.

Mr Butler told the Daily Mirror Mirror On The Wall that "The Queen of Hearts always said that if anything happened to her, I was to take the tarts and hide them under my bed." He continued, "That is how the baked items that the police discovered came to be in my possession."

The Knave of Hearts went on to criticise the police for their "violation of his rights" in removing the tarts.

"It ruined my summer's day," he said, "and *(cont. p. 94)*

The Knave of Hearts removing the tarts for 'safe-keeping'

TOMORROW EXCLUSIVE

'The late Queen of Hearts – was she murdered?' *asks the Knave, in the hope of getting in the paper again.*

ARMY STRUGGLE WITH RECONSTRUCTION WORK

BY RADIO 4'S AWARD-WINNING JOHN HUMPTYS

A SPOKESMAN for all the King's horses and all the King's men defended the role of the military as they tackled the difficult task of reconstructing Humpty Dumpty.

"This isn't strictly our job," said General Armchair. "The role of the modern army is to seek out and destroy unstable eggs. Cleaning up the mess afterwards is something for which we have not been trained."

He concluded, "Local militias on the ground are in a better position to return Humpty Dumpty to normal than we are."

LATE NEWS

Grand Old Duke Of York arrested for war crimes – did he march men to the top of the hill and then pistol whip them down again?

BECAUSE IT'S THERE!
I'M NOT SURE I TURNED THE GAS OFF!
WHEN ARE WE THERE DAD?
TOP OF THE WORLD MA! TOP OF THE WORLD!
GOT ANY CHANGE? *!$!
WANT A NICE TIME DEAR?
NORMALLY WE GO BY THE NORTH RIDGE BUT THIS YEAR WE THOUGHT WE'D GIVE THE SOUTH WEST A GO. MIND YOU IT CAN GET PRETTY TRICKY THIS TIME OF YEAR...
DO WE ALWAYS HAVE TO COME HERE! WHY CAN'T WE GO TO BRIGHTON LIKE OTHER GAY MEN?!
SOB!
STOP SAYING YOU'RE GOING OUT AND MAYBE SOMETIME! IT'S NOT FUNNY ANY MORE!
TRY OUR EVEREST BURGER
BIG ISSUE?
HE'S NOT OUR SHERPA, I THOUGHT HE WAS YOUR SHERPA
MT EVEREST APARTMENTS 1·2·3 BEDROOMS VIEWS TO DIE FOR
I DIDN'T BOOK THE SUMMIT! I THOUGHT YOU BOOKED IT!
I DON'T KNOW WHY, WE COULDN'T HAVE LEFT YOUR MOTHER BEHIND!
7 am 6 pm
KEEP TIBET TIDY
HEATH

COUGH LAUGHS OFF GAFFE

by **Simon Heff**

TORY LEADER Iain Duncan Cough was last night said to be "very relaxed" about an astonishing gaffe by his front bench spokesman Oliver Nitwit.

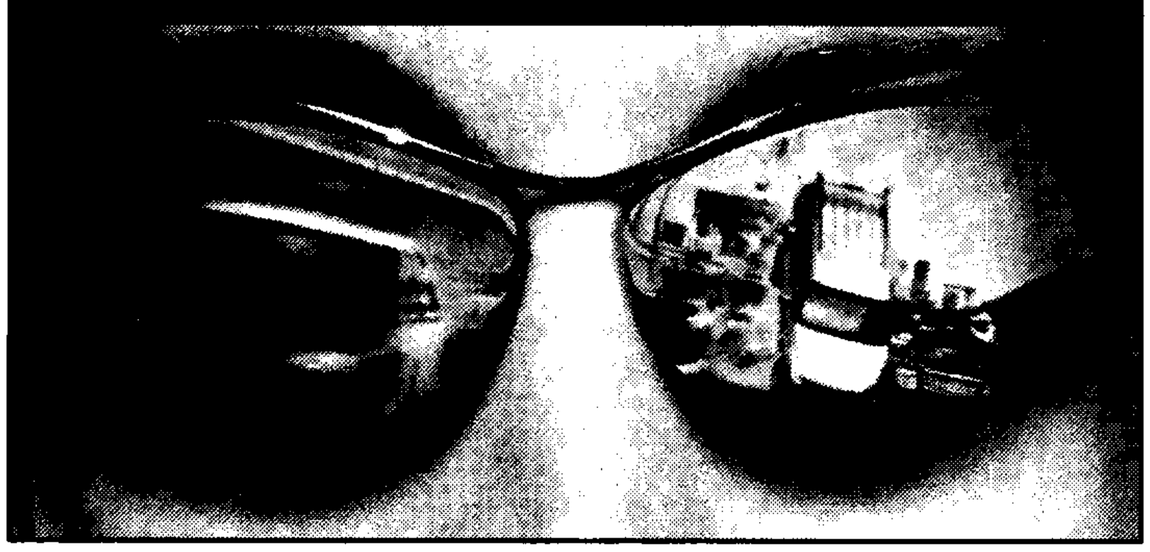
Mr Newtwit, 22, had told an audience of senior policemen, "If I ever get to be Home Secretary – which of course I won't because we're going to lose the election because we're so hopeless, especially Duncan Cough – it would be a miracle."

A spokesman for Mr Cough said, "Iain found Oliver's joke very amusing. We Conservatives have always believed that it is very important to have a sense of humour, particularly when you are absolutely useless and have no chance of winning the next election."

On Other Pages

Is Letwin The Next IDS? asks **Boris Johnson**

At the Movies with JOHNNY HYPE

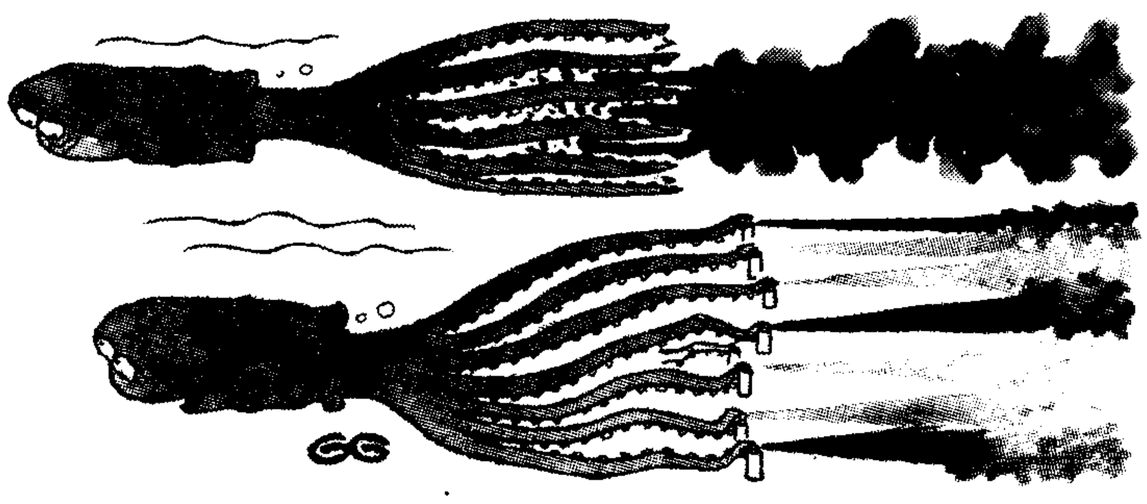


THE MATRIX REGURGITATED

THIS IS a fab film because it must be. Everyone says so. And never before has any movie spent so much money on sending me press releases saying how great it is. Which proves it! Everywhere you look there are spectacular adverts for it and big pieces about it in the newspapers. So it *has* to be brilliant! And I'm hardly going to stick my neck out and say that actually it's the same old stuff except not as good this time round, am I? That's hardly going to get my quote on the poster is it? No, this is "a high-octane, 100-megadrive, pulse-raising, kick-ass, kung-fu action, sci-fi adventure, philosophical thriller whodunnit" *Johnny Hype, The Daily Drivel*. It gets the full five stars from the Johnny Hype column but then so do all the films!!

Hype rating ★★★★★

★	**Absolutely fantastic**
★★	**Really brilliant and great**
★★★	**Big goody bag**
★★★★	**Premiere tickets**
★★★★★	**Invite to Cannes**



"Monochrome is so old school!"

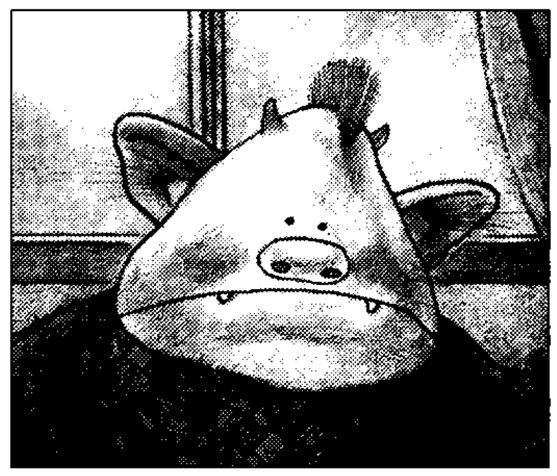
GOVERNMENT'S NEW PLANS FOR SCHOOLS

by Our Education Staff **Phail Space**

THE EDUCATION Secretary, Mr Fungus Bogeyman, has revealed the Government's new strategy for "putting the fun back into education".

Mr Bogeyman told reporters that "children are under too much pressure from targets and tests".

"What I am doing is to make education more enjoyable by underfunding schools so that they have to close down and send pupils home."



Mr Charles Clarke

Fungus and Games

He continued: "So instead of boring old double maths and the literacy hour, the kids can have fun watching television at home."

Said Mr Bogeyman, "We want to teach children a lesson they will never forget – i.e. don't trust me, I'm a Bogeyman."

"Even so, it remains difficult to become a stuntman..."

'STOP CRUEL TESTING' Says Government

by Our Political Staff **Polly Technic**

FOLLOWING complaints of "too much pressure" and "excess stress" the government has agreed to abandon the controversial tests on the euro.

Said one Cabinet member, "You cannot expect fifty-year-old men to cram their heads with facts about the euro and then expect them to answer questions on it.

"No wonder they fail. At this stage of their lives, they are meant to be having fun, not wading through 2,500 pages of economic argument.

"These tests must be scrapped at once and replaced with tickets for the Test against Zimbabwe *(cont. p. 94)*

***From the pen that brought you* Heir Of Sorrows *and* La Dame Aux Camillas**

BORN TO BE QUEEN

The Love Story that dare not speak its name

by SYLVIE KRIN

TONY AND GORDON are trapped in a loveless relationship. Matters are complicated by Tony's old partner, Peter, whose constant interference creates an impossible triangle of seething passions and irreconcilable emotions.

Now read on...

"WE CAN'T go on like this, Gordon." The tall, good-looking, tousle-haired Prime Minister was standing by the window of his elegant drawing room, lit up by the pink rays of a gorgeous London sunset.

On the wall behind him, a gilt-framed portrait of Mrs Thatcher at her most commanding looked down on the two men, who were standing at opposite ends of the room, eyeing each other suspiciously.

"You're still seeing him, aren't you, Tony?" said the saturnine, dark-haired, Byronic Chancellor of the Exchequer. "They tell me you talk to each other every day."

Tony tossed his head petulantly.

"What if I do? And what business is it of yours, anyway?"

The brooding wizard of finance mopped his brow with a lilac handkerchief as he allowed himself to speak frankly of his innermost torment.

"And they're talking about us, Tony. They're saying we can't stop rowing."

"That's not *my* fault, is it?" snapped the boyish, yet fast-ageing, hero of Baghdad.

"Yes it is!"

"No it isn't!"

"Yes it is!"

The bitter, staccato recriminations of the two men were broken into by the melodious ringing of a pink mobile phone from the top drawer of Tony's presidential desk.

"Go on, Tony, answer it. It's him, isn't it? Go ahead and talk to him. You know you want to."

"It's not who you think it is, Gordon."

"Then why is it playing YMCA?"

Tony blushed, as he stepped forward to answer the only-too-familiar ring.

"Look," he murmured into the mouthpiece with a look of embarrassment. "I can't talk now. Certain people are in the room... of course I'm talking to him... he's my friend... Gordon and I go back a long way... Look, Peter, that's not very nice... I don't want to hear that sort of thing...

that's not worthy of you, Peter... Goodbye – and I mean goodbye."

Tony threw the phone back into the drawer and slammed it shut.

There was an uneasy silence as the eyes of the two men met across the room.

"Thank you, Tony," Gordon was the first to speak. "I appreciate what you just did. And you're right, you and I do go back a long, long way..."

His voice trembled with repressed emotion.

"I'm sorry, Gordon. I've been under a lot of stress lately. You know, the war, the Olympic bid, bloody Clare Short – now, there *is* a bitch!"

The two men laughed spontaneously, with a warmth that they hadn't shown each other for years.

"What fools we've been!" said Tony, seizing the moment. "I know – let's have a party, to tell the world that we really are together again..."

"WE really are together again! You can take my word for it." The table of admiring lady journalists, gathered in the fashionable Knightsbridge restaurant La Hacketta, hung on Peter's every word.

"Tony and I have never been closer," he assured the fastest-rising stars of the political journalistic firmament.

They gazed at him adoringly – Anne Applejuice, Sarah Sandcastle, Rachel Silly, Anne McElvoid, Mary-Ann Siegfriedsassoon.

Anything that was passed on in strictest confidence to these influential commentators was certain to be all over the front pages next morning – as he well knew!

"Tony's a lovely man, but he takes his eye off the ball." The sultry Sultan of Spin smiled his shy smile, and arched his eyebrows.

"Now this must go no further, it really mustn't! You'd be very naughty girls if a word of it was ever to appear in your papers."

He took a long meaningful sip of his favourite Brazilian liqueur, Ole Marineros, before delivering his *coup de grace.*

"Gordon's been running rings round Tony recently. But then you knew that, didn't you? I feel so sorry for Tony. You just can't let him out on his own! It's a good thing he's got at least one real friend who's there to pick up the pieces."

Peter winked knowingly at the tableful of women, all scribbling furiously into their notebooks...

© *The Heathrow Airport Pink Fiction Library ("With men in mind...")*

World News

MAN CHANGES HAIRSTYLE

SHOCKING news emerged last night, when it was revealed that a man had changed his hairstyle.

A spokesman for the man said, "All I'm prepared to say is that his hair looks different since this morning's appointment with the barber."

On Other Pages

■ **Dr Thomas Stuttaford** on What Happens When Famous People Visit The Hairdresser.

MAN WHO CHANGED HAIRSTYLE MEETS OLD MAN WHO HAS NOT

THE MAN who has changed his hairstyle had a historic meeting yesterday with an elderly world leader.

On Other Pages

■ **Dr Thomas Stuttaford** on What Happens When Famous People Meet Each Other.

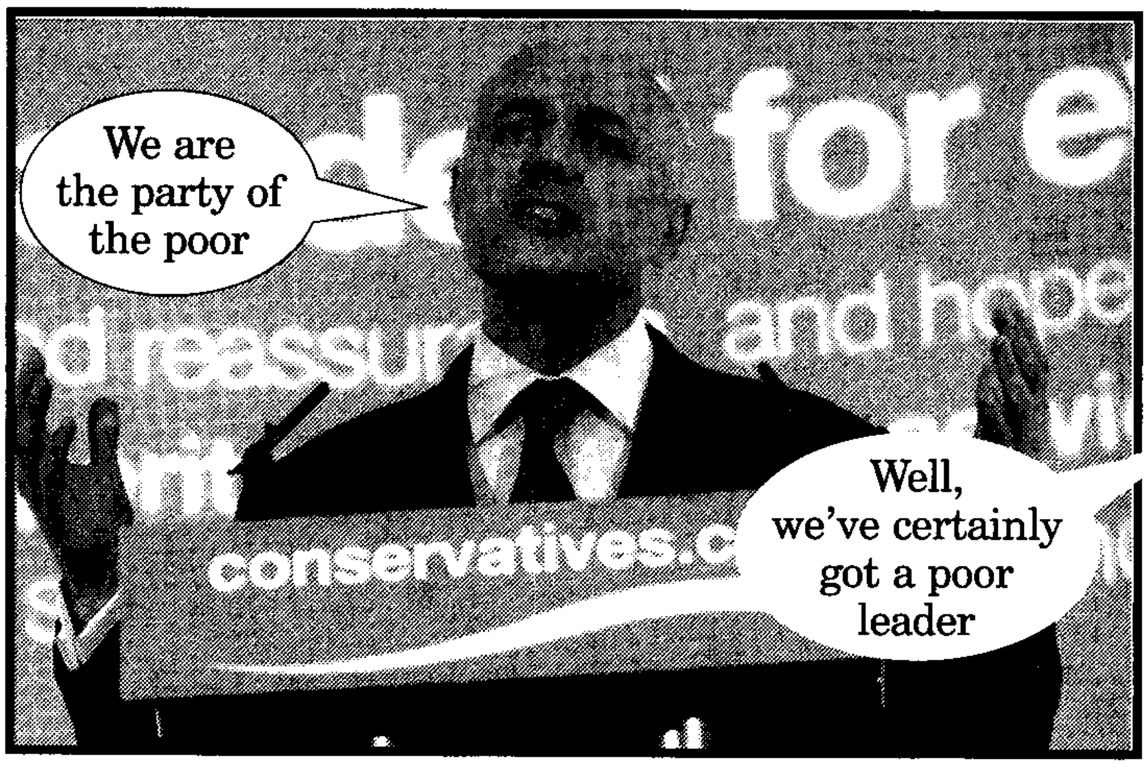
MAN WHO CHANGED HAIRSTYLE AND MET OLD MAN HURTS HAND

THE MAN who has changed his hairstyle hurt his hand yesterday playing football.

On Other Pages

■ **Dr Thomas Stuttaford** on What Happens When People Write Too Many Columns. *(That's enough Beckham. Ed.)*

"For goodness sake Tom, you're supposed to enjoy your retirement."



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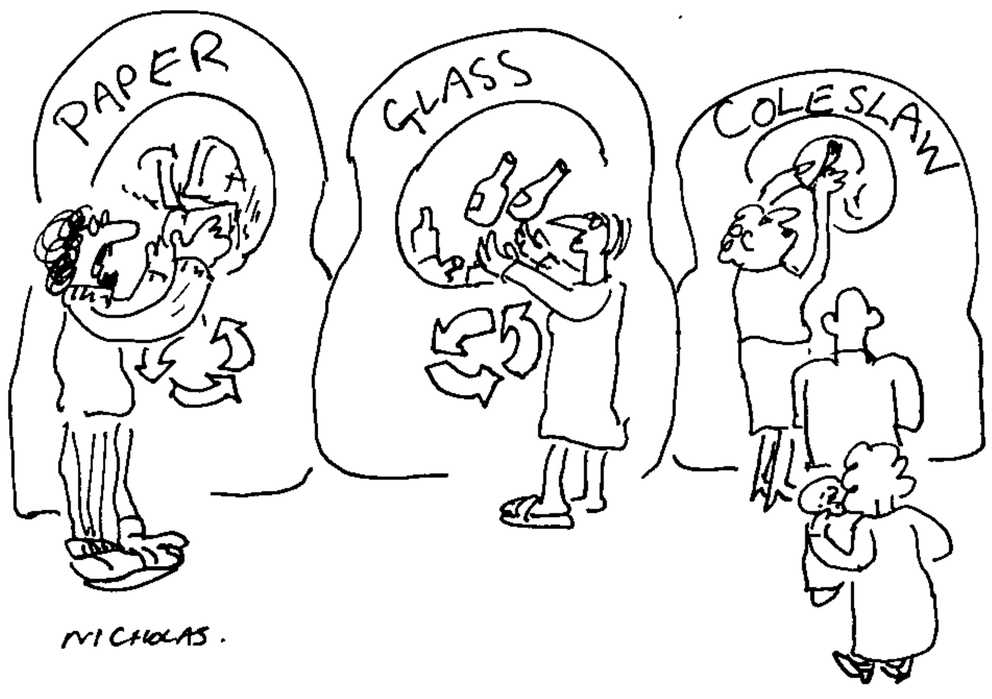
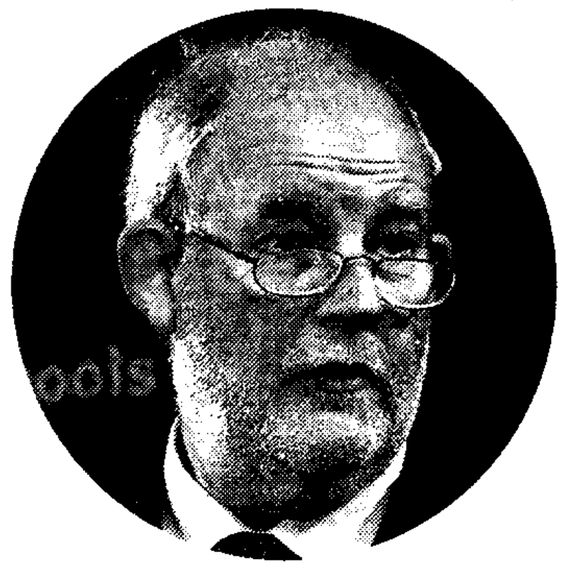


ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK



EDUCATION SECRETARY CHARLES CLARKE

You're on record as saying that spoons are old-fashioned and irrelevant. Is that still your view?

Look, I want to get one thing clear right from the start of this interview. I'm a great supporter of spoons, and a believer in them. I've been misquoted by your lot too often on this, so I am grateful for the chance to set the record straight.

But you did say that you don't believe in spoons for spoons' sake?

Ah, that's completely different. No society can afford to spend unlimited funds on spoons which serve no useful purpose. We don't want a world in which spoons are simply regarded as ornamental, rather than playing a valid economic role.

So you don't really like spoons, do you?

That's just a ridiculous distortion of what I just said. Don't you people ever listen? I have always been entirely consistent about this. Spoons have an important part to play in any civilised society, but at the end of the day, they're only spoons. So, let's try to keep things in proportion, shall we?

Can I assume that you only own modern spoons?

I think old spoons have a lot to be said for them. It's just that I don't happen to have any in my possession. But you shouldn't read anything into that.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

Is this off the record?

NEXT WEEK: Jack Straw – *"Me and My Straw."*

DIARY

MARY ARCHER

Jeffrey Archer, to whom, as is already widely known, I am married, is permitted by the authorities to come home for Sunday lunch every other week. Colleagues and close acquaintances ask how I can possibly cope with seeing so much of him. I respond by saying that, yes, it is a tremendous ordeal, of course it is, but it is an ordeal through which we must somehow get.

I'm sorry, but that's all I want to say on this particular subject.

My preparations for Jeffrey's fortnightly return are indeed extensive, not to say arduous. A few days before, I generally telephone one or two of his former Conservative colleagues. I extend to them an invitation to join us. They inform me they are sadly unavailable owing to pressure of retirement.

"Anyone coming?" asks Jeffrey, excitedly, on the prison telephone.

"Fortunately, Jeffrey, they have all insisted we take a breather this weekend!" I exclaim. In the peculiar situation within which we find ourselves, it is as well to remain positive.

"Fair enough," says Jeffrey. "But why not put their names in our appointments diary anyway? Margaret and Denis, John and Norma, and let's add a bit of razzle dazzle with the Lloyd Webbers. Tremendous!"

Jeffrey remains in good spirits. I insert their names in the diary, and add that of President George W. Bush and his wife, who are close friends. On Jeffrey's instructions I may also lay places for them, just in case. It goes without saying that falsifying one's Sunday lunch guest list is perfectly normal practice in most healthy marriages. I'm sorry, but that is all I am prepared to say on that subject at this juncture.

It is an undeniable feature of contemporary life that those who wish to cook Sunday lunch must first pay a visit to the shops in order to observe the ingredients, with a view to purchase.

First, I visit the butcher. Inconveniently, there are other people before me in the queue. I look at their blank, bored faces and think to myself, "They may be first in the queue, but do these resolutely ordinary people have interesting thoughts going on in their heads?"

I permit myself a discreet smile. As the Chairman of the Lloyds Hardship Committee, I was in touch – not literally of course – with a great many ordinary people. I need no lessons in how to deal with them, thank you very much.

"Good morning, Lady Archer," says the butcher, somewhat abruptly. "And how are you today?"

"Quite well," I reply. "However, I am not here to exchange banter, but rather to purchase raw meat for my husband's return. Let us apply our minds to the matter in hand. And that is all I am prepared to say on the subject."

I am fully aware that there is a perception of me as emotionally cold and perhaps rather arrogant. Utter nonsense, of course, and I have nothing but contempt for the sadly rather dull little people who make the suggestion. I feel things quite as much, or as little, as the next person. But I have no wish to make a public song-and-dance of my emotions.

I have known loss and pain, my goodness I have. Many years ago, after my husband made a silly mistake and we were cheated out of our fortune, I was forced to give up our well-equipped seven-bedroom house in The Boltons. More recently, I had to cancel our annual garden party owing to Jeffrey's absence.

In both cases, the pain was all too real. Yet some people, I'm sorry, I'm not going to deign to name them, some people continue to insist that I am emotionally 'cold'. For these people, I hold nothing but contempt.

On the way home, I enter the greengrocer's shop. What must it be like to serve fruit and vegetables all day, every day? One does feel for these people, of course one does. For this reason, if for no other, they are among my portfolio of interests. It is not their fault, or at least not entirely, that it is not for them to attain the intellectual abilities accorded to the rest of us. "Good morning," I say as I hand the greengrocer my shopping list. I simultaneously award him a brief smile. It is the least one can do.

"Anything else, your ladyship?" says the greengrocer when he has at long last finished packing everything up for one. His remark frankly surprises me.

"I have no recollection of requesting anything else," I say, firmly. By the look on his face, I can see that he acknowledges, however ruefully, the truth of my observation.

Sunday, mid-day. The house is temporarily disturbed as Jeffrey arrives home for lunch. "Hello," I say, a form of greeting I have long found helpful if not wholly necessary within the boundaries of a legal marriage.

Jeffrey's trial and subsequent imprisonment were both highly irksome. Anyone who sat through that trial knew that Jeffrey was not lying. Look at the court records. They conclusively prove that Jeffrey never spoke in his own defence. And let me make it quite clear that Jeffrey has never, ever lied without speaking.

Nor has anyone ever doubted my own version of events. They know better than to do that. I am, among other things, the Chairman of the Ethics Committee at Addenbrookes Hospital, and well used to coming down hard on those who lie incompetently. Life has taught me that the truth is all very well in its place, though people of intelligence may well find it insufficient.

"Delicious meal, Mary! Absolutely marvellous!" says Jeffrey, putting a slice of cooked chicken into his mouth. I glance at my watch.

"Oh dear," I say. "I'm afraid your car will be here for you in an hour and a half. And just when you were enjoying yourself!"

I let him chat away in the kitchen while I go outside and give the roses my full attention. I'm very English like that! I then get him to stand in the drive, say my goodbyes and close the door. There's forty minutes until the car comes for him, but better safe than sorry.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

DEBS, MOODY? NO WAY. SHE'S THE HAPPIEST AND MOST CONTENT WOMAN I'VE EVER KNOWN.
I MEAN, SHE'S ALWAYS SMILING. SHE'S GOT THE SUNNIEST DISPOSITION OF ANYONE.
I'VE NEVER EVEN SEEN HER FROWN, BARRY.
NOR ME, NOW YOU MENTION IT...
WELL, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE WITH THOSE BOTOX INJECTIONS SHE KEEPS HAVING.
OH YEAH.

Literary Review

Seek My Faeces

Seek My Face
John Updike
(Hamish Hamilton, £16.99)

JOHN Updike's impersonation of the serial widow of post-war American art-monsters Zack McCoy (Jackson Pollock) and Guy Holloway (Andy Warhol) being interviewed by a gawky acolyte is obsessed by bodily functions and secretions.

We start by noting on page 39 that "Snot is human". By page 74 Kathryn, the interviewer, having gone for a pee, has "patted her oily dark cleft with a pad of tissue". By page 85 Zack's widow, Hope, is confessing to Kathryn that "There wasn't all this emphasis on oral and anal there is now, though he did like to take me from behind." By page 94 we are discussing Zack's bedwetting propensities, which Hope regards as humiliating but he himself saw as a kind of "discharge" of some obligation towards the earth.

Later on there is a veiled comparison of those famous drip paintings to sexual ejaculation. His artist wife couldn't hack it because, on page 96, "I didn't have a prick." Imitators of his iconic style likewise couldn't match it, lacking the right "equipment", though rival artists accused him, on p 100, of "pissing on canvas". (O how the wee becomes it.) Later Zack explains the difference between them: "I'm a lush and you're a cunt," he tells Hope on p 117. "Cunts can't paint. There are pots and brushes, pots don't paint. They don't stick out. Sticks and brushes paint."

So there (pace Bloomsbury) we have it: all art is cock. By page 145 we are back to wondering about Kathryn's "fresh and oily system" and, on page 147, her "pee". Finally, on page 168, we hit pay-dirt. Now married to Warhol/loway (whose penchant for oral sex is the subject of a blow-by-blow account later on), and improbably blessed with three children, Hope recalls his plan for a "series of canvases in baby shit". She observes philosophically that "urine, faeces" were the first artistic "media". Echoing this, there are references throughout the dialogue to any manifestation of traditional artistry as "representational shit".

Updike is famous for dirty detail, his style an accumulation (a blizzard even) of minute and exact observations, triumphantly not seeing the wood for the trees, or even the trees for the close-up grain of the timber. He must get everything down exactly right, product names, dates, an exact description of the furniture, like a neurotic archivist. Sometimes, as with his observation about microwaved food not retaining its heat, or the description of the pimple on Kathryn's nose (the one with the snot in it), he bungs it in twice, just to make sure it's there for posterity. As with Joyce's Dublin from *Ulysses*, you could reconstruct later 20th century New England from Updike's novels.

Supposedly, this one represents a day in the life, largely taken up with the intrusive questions and rambling answers of the interview, of this ageing muse of America's two most famous, or infamous, artists. Neither man himself gave away much in interviews, preferring to put what he wanted to say, if anything, into his art. Both had a reputation for behaving badly, one a bar-brawling drunkard, the other a cold manipulator.

Hope springs eternally to their defence, but aside from the convenience of her having, fictionally, married them both, there is little she can say for them (in Updike's version, at least) that hasn't in substance been said already in memoir or biography. Updike admits as much in his acknowledgments. Both artists have already been the subject of recent films, so the chance of milking the rights must be slim. Hope herself is partly drawn from Pollock's painter wife Lee Krasner. Their artistic contemporaries are all given false names, so there's a parlour game in spotting which one is Barnett Newman, which one Willem de Kooning, and so forth.

If the facts and key figures are already known to anyone likely to be interested, what more can Updike offer? Well, apart from his Style, the magical writer's prism through which factual lead is transformed into fictional gold, or otherwise, which in Updike's case seems to consist in long sentences like club sandwiches overfilled with clauses that tumble out and make

I'M A CHILDREN'S AUTHOR... I DEAL WITH GOOD AND BAD AND IS THERE SUCH A THING AS INNATE EVIL?
I'M AN ADULT AUTHOR... I DEAL WITH GOING BALD AND FANCYING YOUNGER WOMEN....

the whole thing far too unwieldy to get your mouth around, a bit like this one, and often begin with one subject and end with quite another, such as the one on page 112 which begins with Zack's telegram from Venice, punningly signed "Hopeless", then wanders down the Grand Canal past Hope's imaginary hotel room window, surveys the tourist crowds, discusses the similarity of post-war Germans and Americans and ends up speculating about the passions of prisoners crossing the Bridge of Sighs, or worse still the one on page 205 where Hope recalls hill climbing with her third husband, art collector Jerry Chafetz, then thinks about human consciousness, then suicide, then Hamlet (one recalls that Updike's last novel was a rehash of that fairly well known story, perhaps he has run out of things to say, retaining only a means and desire to say them) er, where was I, yes, long sentences, apart from which, offered by Updike, in this reviewer's opinion – not much.

Books & Bookmen

■ FOR a company allegedly in the communications business, AOL Time Warner isn't too hot at communicating to its book publishing staff the details of their division's proposed sell-off.

A couple of weeks ago David Young, the ceo of Time Warner Books UK, told the *Bookseller*: "The only information that I and others in the company are receiving is that in the US media, which, under the circumstances, is extremely frustrating and undermining."

The sale also suggests that AOL has, surprisingly for a multinational, no long-term corporate strategy. Just two years ago it spent millions rebranding the publishing division (which went under the venerable name of Little, Brown) as Time Warner Books.

Now the new owner (the small but heavyweight US firm Perseus looks like the front-runner, though Simon & Schuster is in with a shout) will face the expense of changing the name back again or finding an alternative.

As the sale rumbles on, the company is about to lose one of its best editors. Alan Samson, who has been there since it was the Robert Maxwell-owned Macdonald, but was passed over for the publisher's job when Philippa Harrison retired – is off to Orion as commissioning director for non-fiction. If any of other senior staff decide to leave, AOL Time Warner will be selling a very depleted company.

■ *NEARLY two years after publisher-cum-digital print operation Stratus Holdings plc (see* Eyes passim*) went into receivership, administrator BDO Stoy Hayward is ready to start repaying creditors. This is good news for preferential creditors like the Inland Revenue and former employees who'll be paid in full, but it's less good for the unsecured ones who'll receive just 3.2p for each pound they're owed.*

And how was the money raised? The assets of Stratus Holdings plc were sold for a rock-bottom price to a new company called House of Stratus Ltd, owned and run by David Lane, founder of the original plc. The BDO document admits that Xerox gear has been sold on at a loss. So, in effect, Lane is running the company he set up originally, but by the simple stratagem of latterly paying no one for services rendered, then liquidating the whole company before buying it back, all of those tricky costs like equipment, intellectual property and shareholders' dividends have been eliminated.

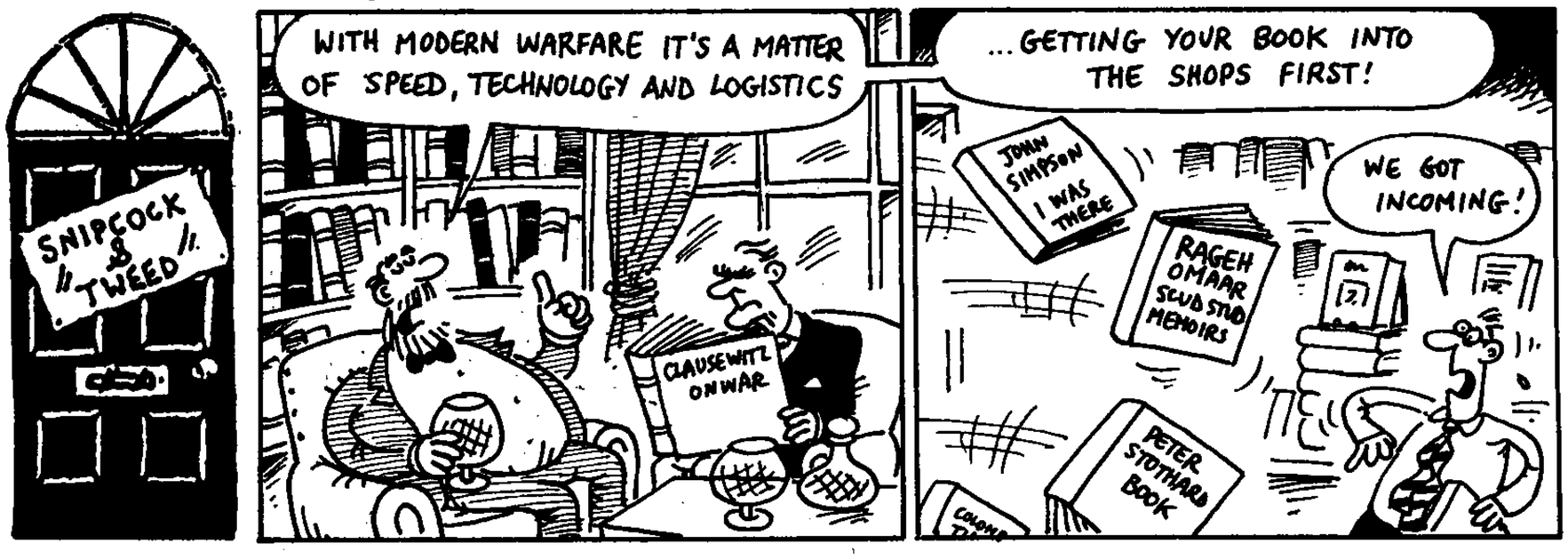
■ IT'S usually the job of literary agents to sell clients' books to publishers. But the Blake Friedmann agency is also keen to flog its own books to would-be clients.

Wannabe authors who submit manuscripts receive a standard letter from the agency suggesting: "If you haven't already seen Carole Blake's book entitled *From Pitch to Publication* (published by Macmillan, £14.99), which contains information on how to present your work to agents and publishers, you might be interested in obtaining a copy."

Generously Ms Blake – better known for her Imelda Marcos-style shoe collection than for being much cop as an agent – can let the poor MS-submitting schlubs have a copy at the knock-down price of twelve quid.

If she's taken advantage of her own 50 percent author's discount, she could be clearing £4.50 profit on each copy sold – a deal more than she'd get otherwise. Who said there's no money in publishing?

'Bookworm'


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
WITH MODERN WARFARE IT'S A MATTER OF SPEED, TECHNOLOGY AND LOGISTICS
CLAUSEWITZ ON WAR
...GETTING YOUR BOOK INTO THE SHOPS FIRST!
JOHN SIMPSON I WAS THERE
RAGEH OMAAR SCUD STUD MEMOIRS
WE GOT INCOMING!
PETER STOTHARD BOOK

A Major talent

Days Without Number

Robert Goddard

(Bantam, £16.99)

"JOHN Major's favourite novelist" always had the sound of a joke as a poster-line – and perhaps even more so since the revelation that the PM had actually been shagging senseless another leading populist English novelist only shortly before giving Goddard his endorsement.

So many readers will regard as a bit of a cheek the coverline on *Days Without Number* – Goddard's 15th novel in 17 years – which boasts "His New Bestseller". This predictive branding is common publishing practice but is usually applied only to the Grishams, Rowlings and other cases in which only a direct nuclear strike on all branches of Smith's and Waterstones could prevent their books reaching number one.

Yet – oddly – it probably wouldn't be worth taking aim under the trades descriptions act at Goddard. His annual hardbacks and paperbacks usually do at least a week or two in the Top Tens and this one is no exception. The books indeed read uncannily like a literary distillation of John Major, although, regrettably, it's the bureaucrat who couldn't say "want" properly rather than the one who left Edwina feeling sticky and satisfied.

One suspects that Goddard's readership is mainly men nearing retirement. Who else – after all – is the likeliest readership for these novels in which very dull middle-aged men receive some kind of unexpected legacy or bequest and – after an interlude in which someone is inexplicably trying to kill them – discover towards the end that their mother wasn't really their mother or that they have a brother they've never met?

Days Without Number is set in Cornwall where Nick Paleologus arrives to see his ageing father. That exotic surname allows the author to bring in a lot of tone-raising guff about the Emperors of Byzantium, from whom Nick's clan are supposedly descended.

With a sharp eye for his target audience, the McGuffin here is the property market. Nick's dad has received a ridiculously high offer for his house beside the Tamar. In reality, the reason would be that a coke-crazed TV exec from London didn't know the local market but, in a middle-brow thriller, it's obviously because something is hidden in the house which – even people who voted for John Major are likely to work out – probably has links with Byzantium.

The prose and dialogue rapidly convince you that the attraction of these books to John Major was the reassurance that there were other people who spoke like him. Typically, when Nick smells bacon frying, it's "an aroma which he found distinctly alluring". The speech contains lines unheard since Christie: "Maybe this woman who introduced herself to you as Emily Braybourne is an imposter. Have you considered that possibility?"

And so we have that odd English phenomenon: the anonymous minor bestseller. In about 30 years' time, if charity book-stalls still exist, you'll find little lines of paperback Goddards, faded by holiday sun and splashed with the local red, as his loyal readers die and their libraries are cleared out.

Strangely, the long list of Goddard's titles seems to signal an inner apprehension that here is a writer making less impact than he'd hoped for: Past Caring, Painting The Darkness, Closed Circle, Borrowed Time, Set In Stone. And any readers who stumble on this one who weren't keen members of their local Conservative Party in the 90s will find it hard not to slip Freudianly into thinking of this one as *Books Without Number*.

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS Pt 94

Are You Talking To Me?

John Walsh

(HarperCollins, £16.99)

A FRIDAY night. The enticing purlieus of the Groucho. The company of my ever fragrant publicist, Eurydice. What more could a bouffant-haired senior journalist want?

"How terribly clever of you to know about Beckett," I murmured, smoothing down the collar of my Paul Smith windcheater (a memento of that hard-hitting *Independent* feature "John Walsh gets restyled"), "and is that a pashmina or what the Americans might call a sorority smock...?" Alas, the flinty gleam in her eye told me that this was no night for banter.

"Be quiet John," she snapped. "This is serious. It's time you wrote another book. Do you know how long it is since you remembered you were brought up Catholic? Fourteen years! A good four since you decided you were Irish. And seeing that your novel isn't selling..."

"The Jellybys Move to 22a Camden Passage," I fondly interjected.

"...Possibly because you haven't finished it, I suggest you think of something quick."

What was I to do? A dozen projects flashed before me. The first authorised biography of Tatu? The story of my friendship with the former members of Genesis? Without warning, the framed picture on the wall – surely it was Bogart in, what was that film called, *Marrakesh*? – worked its effect. Celluloid, that was it! My life as a box-office junkie! Swiftly I dashed into the street and caught a taxi home. My partner met me at the door.

"Where have you been?"

"Here's looking at you kid," I playfully remarked.

"What?"

"No, it's the subject of my new book. 'I am forty-nine going on fifty'" I gamely improvised. "'I could shack up with you.' Don't you see? My life in the movies. The time we went to Venice and it was just like *Don't Look Now*."

"No it wasn't. It rained and you had food poisoning."

"Or the time I was forced to question my sexuality over *Cabaret*."

"That's not how I remember it."

But there was no gainsaying me. Pile of swag in the bank, courtesy of that nice Mr Fishwick, I sat down with the video of, um, *2002: A Space Iliad*. Then the phone rang. My editor, doubtless, with a sizzling commission.

"John," said a voice. "This is the big one. We'd like you to test-drive the new range of Calvin Klein boxer shorts."

"Go ahead punk... er Mr Kelner," I breathed happily. "Make my day!"

Pseuds Corner

It all recalls new historicist theories of carnival – once yearly bouts of transgressive fun, where governors are 'punished' by the governed in elaborately devised play acting, take place not to subvert authority, but rather to reinforce it by incorporating subversion into its grand design.

ZOE WILLIAMS considers 'I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here'
Guardian

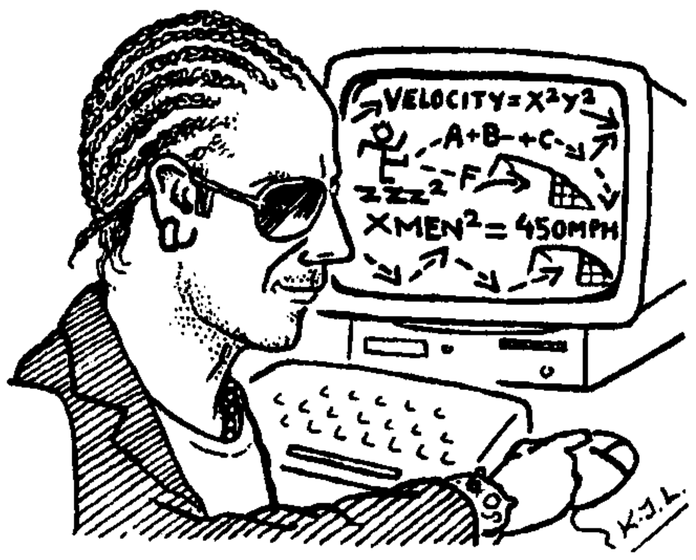
It's not really about music. He's more an instinctive psychosexual performance poet and, arguably, one of the finest socio-political commentators America ever had. Indeed, you wonder if pop music is a big enough canvas for Manson these days.

BARBARA ELLEN interviews Marilyn Manson, *Observer Magazine*

He knew all about the importance of stationery. He was generous, making me a small gift of, of all things, a packet of felt pens. I found this strangely moving: it's been a long time since anyone gave me a packet of felt pens.

ROBERT CRAMPTON meets Tony Buzan, *Times Magazine*

Engineers in Japan, England and Belgium conducted a study of his free kicks and concluded that he had a staggering mastery of physics. Dr Keith Hanna, of the software company Fluent Benelux, which undertook the study, says that [David] Beckham has figured out how to balance the kick angle, kick speed, spin



imparted and kick direction to get the optimal turbulent-laminar transition trajectory that is impossible for goalkeepers to save. 'Beckham can carry out a multi-variable physics calculation in his head to compute the exact kick trajectory required and then execute it perfectly,' he says.

Sunday Times

You will love and admire us and want to be our friends. We will inspire you because we are the future. You will learn from us. Come, take our hand. We are going to show you our world.

Invitation to Royal College of Art event

Although Laqueur is an authoritative guide to solo sex, what Camilo Jose Cela called "the intimate, exalted, utterly refined vice of the solitary" is not the full story of masturbation. Unfortunately, *Solitary Sex* had been copy-edited before Laqueur found David Stevenson's scrupulously documented history of the Beggar's Benison (see TLS, August 15, 1997), a male sex club started in Fife in 1732... Although Laqueur elsewhere notes instances of masturbation as a social activity – Strindberg, for example, with other boys, after swimming together – he skimps the historical examples and meanings of masturbation as a shared experience. He is even too perfunctory about such contemporary versions of the Beggar's Benison as the New York Jacks and or the Melbourne Wankers [*continues*]

RICHARD DAVENPORT-HINES reviews Thomas W. Laqueur's *Solitary Sex: A cultural history of masturbation, Times Literary Supplement*

CONTRIBUTORS: John Preston, John Foulis, Peter Davies, Rob Shapted, APR, Strobes.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

MAPELEY TAX AVOIDANCE

PRESCOTT AND THE BERMUDA TANGLE

THE *Eye*'s special report on the Inland Revenue's connivance at tax avoidance (*The Artful Dodgers*: see last issue) has produced a rich crop of new information on the subject. The most remarkable is a copy of the "direct agreement" to sell the Inland Revenue properties to the Mapeley group, which was signed on 6 March 2001 and which up to now has been kept secret.

The agreement is between the board of Inland Revenue, the commissioners of Customs and Excise, the secretary of state for environment, transport and the regions (John Prescott), Halifax plc (on behalf of the lending banks) and "Mapeley Steps Contractor Ltd, registered in England and Wales, and Mapeley Steps Ltd, registered in Bermuda".

John Prescott

This is the clearest possible proof that from the outset of the agreement all the parties, including the government in the shape of John Prescott, knew perfectly well that at least one of the companies buying the government buildings was registered in a tax haven.

The opportunity to avoid tax in Bermuda was a crucial ingredient of the Mapeley bid. It was written into the tender documents prepared by the big City solicitors Lovells for the government. Mapeley's argument was that any company mounting a bid on such a scale would be deterred from bidding unless it could avoid tax.

Under the contract, the Revenue and Customs pay a "facility unitary payment" of £240m a year in 12 monthly increments. The problem for the company is that the huge estate is proving about £10m a year more expensive than that and Mapeley is trying, apparently with some success, to get this extra money back from the taxpayer. The company has been dogged by a very high staff turnover, not improved by its managers' habit of firing anyone who dares point out to its directors any shortcomings in the deal with the government.

Meanwhile the *Eye* report has been hailed by two organisations representing the people who work in tax and customs offices. The small Union of Senior Revenue Officials (USRO), whose members are in the highest flight of tax inspectors, held its annual conference in London on 14 May and unanimously, in scenes of unusual enthusiasm, passed the following motion: "That this Annual General Meeting calls on the committee to report to the Board (of the Revenue) that the handling of the STEPS deal with Mapeley has undermined the work of many USRO members".

That evening USRO held its annual cocktail party and dinner at the Café Royal. Two invited guests suddenly found that for reasons beyond their control they could not attend. They were Gordon Brown, chancellor of the exchequer, and, more surprisingly, Sir Nicholas Montagu, chairman of the Inland Revenue board. His place was taken by his colleague Dave Hartnett (see *Eyes passim*).

Steven Bibby, USRO's chairman, widely known for his partiality to arslikhan, gave his usual speech about what a wonderful year it had been, and was greeted with the usual "hear hears", until he came to a bit about Sir Nicholas. When he deplored the rough treatment his beloved chairman had received from the press, there was a profound silence, punctuated only (can our correspondent be right?) by the occasional suppressed giggle.

On the same day, the PCS, the trade union that represents some 50,000 workers in the Inland Revenue, put out a strongly-worded press release announcing the publication of the *Eye* supplement and calling for the estate of the Inland Revenue and Customs "to be brought back into the public sector". General secretary Mark Serwotka said: "First we hear that the Revenue estate has been sold to a company based in a tax haven and now we learn that the taxpayer may have to bail it out. There should be a public inquiry."

Four days later, on 19 May, the treasury sent its reaction to the House of Commons treasury select committee, whose members were so critical of the Mapeley deal. Most of the government's responses are feeble in the extreme, merely "noting" the highly critical conclusions of the committee. But in one crucial respect the treasury is not at all happy with the plea from Sir Nicholas Montagu that by law he had no alternative but to sell his buildings to a company in a tax haven.

The response includes an annexe from the Office of Government Commerce, whose first nine paragraphs appear to support Sir Nicholas's view. A tenth paragraph, however, entitled "allowable restrictions", expressly states: "It would also be possible for departments to make it a contract condition (notified in advance) that the successful bidder will be prohibited from using particular tax arrangements, including offshore tax havens."

That is the reply direct to Sir Nicholas Montagu. It is, according to the government's own experts, perfectly possible in law to limit bids to countries that are not tax havens. The treasury promises to put this into action by new guidance to its departments giving them the "discretion to consider restrictions to procurement processes to reflect the government's stated objectives to tax transparency and openness". Game, set and match against Sir Nicholas.

HIGH BROW AND BOBROW

THE accountants' joint disciplinary scheme was set up by the Institute of Chartered Accountants to regulate the behaviour of accountancy firms auditing company accounts.

All members of the institute contribute to the cost of the scheme's investigations – including Ernst & Young, one of the country's Big Four accountancy firms, whose partners are fervent believers in self-regulation.

One of the biggest outstanding City scandals is the demise of the Equitable Life Assurance Society. Since losing a case in the House of Lords three years ago, it has systematically slashed the payments pledged to its policy holders. Some sceptics believe that some of the blame for this monumental disaster should be shared by Equitable's auditors at Ernst & Young, and a complex case against the accountants, claiming £1.5bn, has started to wend its weary way through the high court.

Ernst & Young's expensive lawyers argue that there is no shred of a case that the accountants were negligent, and the argument is likely to go on for a very long time. Whoever wins the case, m'learned friends on both sides will pocket an unimaginable amount of money.

A shorter and less expensive way of deciding the matter emerged when a complaint about Ernst & Young at Equitable Life was made to the joint disciplinary scheme. The scheme's executives decided this was a case they should investigate. The normal procedure was for the accountants and their accusers to put their case to the disciplinary committee, which would arrive at a decision about whether or not the accountants had behaved according to the standards of the institute.

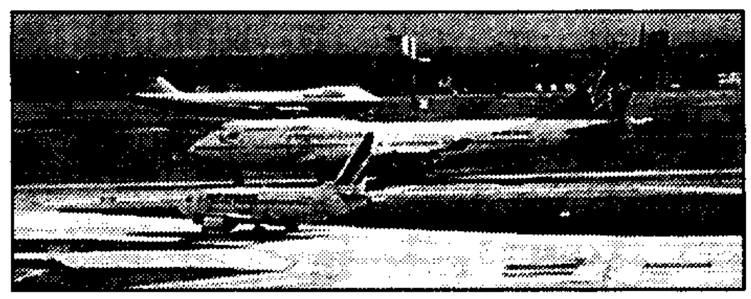
This was the procedure agreed by all top accountants, including Ernst & Young, when the scheme was set up. But when the JDS announced an investigation into Ernst & Young, the accountants were outraged. They put together a high-powered legal team consisting of two very expensive QCs (Mark Hapgood and Tim Dutton) and another barrister, Mark Simpson, just to make sure, plus the City solicitors Barlow, Lyde & Gilbert, who don't come cheap either.

The team argued for an application to stop the JDS investigation. JDS fielded one QC (Michael Beloff) and two other barristers. The case was heard in October last year by Mr Justice Burnton. The Ernst & Young team argued that an investigation by the accountants' own institute might prejudice the result of any other high court action, not to mention the Penrose inquiry into Equitable Life.

These arguments took five days. They were firmly rejected by the judge, who refused leave to appeal. Determined as ever, the Ernst & Young team petitioned the court of appeal, where they were again rebuffed. The cost of this extravagant and entirely unnecessary case has not yet been computed, but at least the accountants gained valuable time before having to put their case to their own disciplinary committee. That is now going ahead, and is likely to be concluded many months if not years before the main legal case with Equitable.

PS: These cases will be followed very closely by the chief executive of Ernst & Young, Richard Bobrow. Mr Bobrow will be hoping that there will be no reference to his own financial affairs. He recalls with some distaste the proceedings at Hamilton county superior court, Indianapolis, USA, in which his wife Jan, whom he wanted to divorce, sued for half the couple's wealth. The judge awarded her 60 percent, some $14m. She was delighted with this sum, but surprised by it. Her husband had never given her a clue as to how rich he was and, before the rift, had generously awarded her an allowance of $5,000 a month to take care of their four children. When he asked for a divorce, he'd just as generously offered her a million dollars, a 14th of what she got in court.

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...



■ **HEATHROW EXPANSION:** So BAA, the UK's biggest airport operator, now backs plans for a third runway at Heathrow and suggests that predicted pollution increases around the airport have been "over-stated".

Can this be the same BAA which, in its efforts to secure backing from local residents for the construction of terminal five, said at the lengthy airport expansion inquiry that a third runway would have such severe and widespread impacts on the environment as to be totally unacceptable?

And could it be the same BAA which boasted that because it had called on the inspector to rule out a third runway, it had boosted local support for terminal five "to about 2 to 1 in favour and enough to calm local politicians and make permission more likely..."?

Or the same BAA that assured John McDonnell, the local Labour MP for Hayes and Harlington, that it would not seek further expansion at the airport if it got the go-ahead for terminal five?

BAA rejects accusations that it has lied and deceived locals over the terminal suggesting it was the government, not BAA, which refused to rule out a third runway. At the Heathrow Airport Consultative Committee (HACC) meeting last week, the authority said it could not reject a third runway on technical grounds and environmental issues were for the government to decide. Yeah, right.

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTCH

DESMOND Swayne, Tory MP for New Forest West, is a mild sort of chap. But his speech introducing an adjournment debate on 15 May was anything but mild.

This was the third Commons debate he had initiated on behalf of his constituent, George Atkinson, whom he described accurately as "our longest-serving British prisoner in the Middle East region". Mr Swayne was angry. He had not raised the scandalous imprisonment of his constituent for six years, he said, "because ministers told me to shut up". For nearly five years foreign office ministers had hinted to him that if he kept quiet about Mr Atkinson, the authorities would deal with the matter to everyone's satisfaction.

Last year, while Swayne was obligingly keeping his mouth shut, Mr Atkinson was taken from his cell and savagely beaten for no apparent reason. The beating was "explained" a few weeks ago by the foreign office as the outcome of "disturbances at the prison when we understand police were called in to quell fighting among local prisoners". Mr Atkinson was not connected with these disturbances and yet he was beaten with rubber truncheons nonetheless.

The shocking story of George Atkinson was set out five years ago in *Eye* 953 under the heading SAY DUBAI TO JUSTICE. For 11 years after 1982, Mr Atkinson lived in Dubai with his family and designed all three golf courses there. The authorities were very friendly to him until the golf course and other design work was finished, when they suddenly threatened to punish him for paying commissions they had agreed and encouraged.

On course in Dubai: George Atkinson (right)

Unnerved by this change in attitude, Mr Atkinson and his family returned to England. He surrendered all his business assets and goodwill to the Dubai government, maintaining only his title to the Dubai Classic golf tournament. When the Dubai World Trade Centre continued to use the name of the Classic without crediting him, he sued. In March 1997, he returned for the tournament, only to be seized, cast in jail without explanation and eventually charged with defrauding the Dubai government of £1.5m.

He was eventually convicted and sent to prison for six years. The main evidence against him was an affidavit from Steve Trutch, a British employee of the building firm Laings. Trutch's affidavit accusing Atkinson was in glaring contrast to other affidavits he'd sworn in 1994 that said exactly the opposite. But the unsupported Trutch affidavit was enough to convict and imprison Mr Atkinson.

Mr Trutch was not available to back his affidavit in court. He was skulking in England. Helene Atkinson, George's outraged wife, reported Trutch to the Hampshire police. At Winchester crown court in November 2001, Trutch pleaded guilty to two counts of perjury and four counts of perverting the course of justice. Affidavits he'd signed were proved false. Judge Pryor said he had no alternative but to send him to prison for nine months.

In 1998, the United Nations working group on arbitrary detention held that Mr Atkinson's detention was unlawful, a decision since confirmed (*Eye* 1075). Yet in the House of Commons debate on the Atkinson case on 15 May, Mike O'Brien, parliamentary under secretary at the foreign office and a strong supporter of the UN, could not bring himself to utter a single word of criticism of the way Mr Atkinson's case had been handled.

COURT OF APPEAL

IRKSOME FOR ERKIN

THE appeal court has finally quashed the deeply unsafe conviction of Erkin Guney, jailed for 14 years for possessing a gun and supplying heroin. But the appeal judges declined to tell the 38-year-old why he has been wrongly incarcerated for seven years and why the court has now overturned his conviction.

Guney has always maintained that he was set up by a business rival in collusion with bent police, when officers acting on "intelligence" raided his house and found a handgun and ammunition in one bedroom and five bags of heroin worth £750,000 in another.

Last Friday Lord Justice Kennedy said that "doubt has been cast upon the integrity of persons who were then (but are no longer) police officers, and who played an important part in gathering intelligence". But he said no more. There was, he said, a balance to be struck between a duty to inform Mr Guney of what had happened and a need to protect others "who might be endangered if more were said".

Guney's appeal must have been one of the shortest on record. The crown prosecution service (CPS) had already thrown in the towel, admitting that "new sensitive material" completely undermined its case so "no sensible argument could be mounted to maintain the safety of this conviction". Thus there was no discussion of the case in open court.

Eye readers will recall that it was secret "sensitive" material withheld from Guney's defence team and from the jury that played a major part in his wrongful conviction in the first place. The crown used public interest immunity certificates to conceal evidence believed to relate, among other things, to police and their informants.

But while PII certificates protected prosecution material in the case, loopholes in the evidence it presented gave weight to Guney's claims of innocence. There was no fingerprint or DNA evidence linking him to the drugs, gun or ammunition; there was no proof he'd ever profited from drug dealing, so no confiscation order was made on any of his assets; no drug paraphernalia was ever found on his property; the cling film wrapping the handgun was different to that found in the house.

A serving police officer, aware that Guney had had difficulties with rival businessmen, gave evidence on his behalf, saying that he believed Guney had been stitched up. Further concerns about a possible miscarriage of justice were raised when tape-recordings came to light supposedly of detectives offering to "scupper" Guney's trial in return for £50,000 from Guney's millionaire father, Ramadan Guney, the Turkish Cypriot businessman who stood bail for disgraced Polly Peck tycoon Asil Nadir.

Although the Met's anti-corruption unit investigated the tapes, Knacker of the Yard concluded there was insufficient evidence for a prosecution.

Guney's case was sent to the appeal court for consideration last summer by the criminal cases review commission. It was deeply concerned but said it could not give too many details away because they were too "sensitive". On Friday the court of appeal did the same thing. Tim Greene, Guney's solicitor said: "The court decided to protect the police, rather than tell Mr Guney why he spent seven years in jail for something he didn't do."

MMR AND AUTISM

TRIPLE JUMP

WORRIED British parents seized on last week's publication in the US of new research that points to a link between the MMR triple jab and autism and other neurological disorders to renew their calls for single vaccines and a public inquiry.

The research, in the online medical journal International Pediatrics, was trailed in the *Eye* last month. It found a "statistically significant" increased risk of autism, mental retardation and brain damage following MMR in cases reported within five to 10 days of immunisation. It said the relative risk of autism was five times higher after MMR than after the combined DTP vaccine for diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough.

The researchers were Dr Mark Geier, president of the Genetics Centers of America, and David Geier, president of medico-legal consultancy, Medcon. They examined the US register of vaccine reactions, known as the VAERS database. Although the paper identified serious reactions in a relatively small number of children compared with the numbers vaccinated, the researchers called for the jab to be reformulated using a "safer" dead virus instead of live forms. Further, they added that if live MMR virus is to continue to be used, parents should have the option of giving them singly.

Jackie Fletcher, of the UK support group Jabs, said the study mirrored the pattern of the 2,000 "damaged" children on Jabs' books. Jabs found that while the onset of autism or epilepsy or other conditions was within a month of vaccination, many children had suffered an immediate reaction.

"But when we report these recognised adverse reactions, no one wants to know," she said. Indeed, there are no plans for any change at the department of health following the new study. It immediately condemned the work as "seriously flawed". Yet the Geiers are not without a decent track record in this area of research. Other publications by the pair which have relied on adverse reactions identified on the VAERS database have led to changes in US vaccination policy – including the withdrawal of the rotaviris and Lyme disease vaccines, the change from using whole cell whooping cough vaccine to an accellular vaccine and, most recently, the removal of a mercury-based preservative from all childhood vaccines.

As Jackie Fletcher says, in the US the relative risks of damage from vaccine is recognised by both the US government and the drug companies themselves. As readers of the *Eye* special report on the MMR story will know, the American National Vaccine Compensation Programme has paid out well over $1bn to vaccine-damaged children in the last 15 years – about 14 percent has gone to MMR victims. The drug companies pay a risk-based tax on each shot to fund the scheme. MMR and DTP are both taxed highly at more than $4.40 a shot, compared to the low risk tax of just 29 cents for polio and six cents for diptheria/tetanus.

Unfortunately, anxious parents in Britain will either have to keep faith with MMR, fail to have their children vaccinated or embark on the increasingly difficult and costly battle to secure single jabs for their children. According to some parents, some private companies are cashing in. Indeed, the Jabs single vaccines website shows that some are charging up to £150 for single measles jabs, £140 for mumps and £120 for rubella – extraordinary sums when other doctors and clinics can do them for as little as £42, £45 and £19 respectively.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

LABOUR party donor and steel baron Lakshmi Mittal, for whose offshore steel group Tony Blair went to bat for Britain in, er, Rumania, will no doubt be surprised and saddened at the prosecutions currently under way in two countries where his LNM/Ispat International group does business involving local politicians with whom he is familiar.

US prosecutors are building a major corruption case against James Giffen, the American "gatekeeper" who was the man oil companies had to see if they wanted to do business in the former Soviet central Asian republic of Kazakhstan. Giffen was the "bag man" for the Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev and has been charged with being the conduit through which $78m reached Nazarbayev and others in his circle.

In Trinidad, meanwhile, former prime minister Basdeo Panday faces charges of failing to declare NatWest bank accounts in London which contained at least £550,000 and maybe more than £1m.

Mittal has done business with both Nazarbayev and Panday. Ispat took over the state-owned Karmet steel works in Kazakhstan and during Panday's period as premier it expanded its Trinidad operations following the earlier acquisition of the state-owned steel plant.

The Karmet deal has been mired in allegations of pay-offs. Last year a former Ispat executive claimed that $100m in commissions had been paid. Ispat used as its agent in Kazakhstan a Russian, Patokh Chodiev, who was to metal deals in Kazakhstan what Giffen was to oil. As a US businessman who knew Giffen and Kazakhstan told the *Financial Times*: "Everyone paid fees in that part of the world. It was just standard."

All the payments to Nazarbayev and his circle by foreign investors were routed through accounts at Credit Agricole in Switzerland. Giffen was paid by Mobil, Amoco (now owned by BP), Phillips Petroleum, Texaco, British Gas, TotalFinaElf, Royal Dutch Shell and ENI. An original investigation by the Swiss authorities identified the accounts and the beneficiaries. This information was then made available to the US and Belgian investigators who had begun an investigation involving Chodiev. Ironically the initial request for assistance came from Kazakhstan itself as part of its row with the David and Simon Reuben's Trans World metals group who were replaced by Chodiev and friends.

Chodiev and his two partners in the Eurasian group, which used to have offices in London and Brussels, are still under investigation by the Belgian authorities over $55m in commissions/ bribes paid by the local group Tractebel for a gas pipeline contract and face charges for money laundering.

The Belgian authorities requested assistance from Britain regarding bank accounts held here by Chodiev and his partners Almaz Ibragimov and Alexander Mashkevich. They have also sought to have Mittal interviewed about his dealings with Chodiev. This request has so far not been met. Mittal's lawyers challenged the basis of the request.

Trinidad has also sought help from the British authorities over the Panday investigation. In addition to the bank account there have been allegations that Panday's family acquired a London property for £375,000 through a Guernsey company which rents the Kensington flat to the Pandays. There was also speculation about the ownership of a Mercedes Benz used by the Pandays, whose two daughters live in London.

"I hear this is the new stockbroker belt..."

However, Panday has only been charged with making false declarations to the independent commission which monitors politicians' assets. The trial is in abeyance following an appeal over its legality.

The former prime minister claims he did not declare a NatWest current account because it was opened by his wife even though it then became a joint account. However, bank records also show transfers from a deposit account.

The Panday trial is likely to be embarrassing for NatWest as it is clear it never queried how large sums could be paid into the account of the Trinidad prime minister's wife which dwarfed his declared salary. Between 1997 and 2001 there were several chunky payments ranging from £20,000 to £150,000.

So much for all those money-laundering regulations and sensitivity for accounts linked to PEPs – politically exposed persons – that City banks are supposed to be so alert for these days.

No doubt Lakshmi Mittal will be glad that he will not be dragged into the embarrassment surrounding Nazarbayev and Panday's bank accounts.

THE City police were much criticised in February when they announced that Wessex Water chairman Colin Skellett would not face any charges of corruption over the takeover by Malaysian group YTL following his high profile arrest in August. As *Eye* 1074 reported, it was the circumstances surrounding the £920,000 up-front payment for a five-year consultancy agreement which aroused suspicion.

Just what those circumstances were has now been made clear. And they go a long way to explaining why the police acted even though it is clear Skellett was not paid to influence the sale by Enron to YTL.

The explanation for the arrest was made in the Commons by junior home office minister Michael Wills in reply to an adjournment debate raised by Skellett's MP, Don Foster. The debate took place on 18 March, almost a month after the *Eye* reported that the original intention had been for Skellett to receive his up-front payment through an offshore Isle of Man company. Skellett had only ever mentioned actually receiving the money into his account at Barclays in Stoke on Trent.

Strangely, the story told by Wills has not been reported until now – despite the huge interest Skellett's case attracted. But then it suggests Skellett was to some extent perhaps the architect of his own misfortune and that his initial intentions were perhaps somewhat different from those with which he regaled the public after his arrest.

The home office minister said that an offshore company had been told in April 2002 to expect a £1.2m payment largely for onward payment to an unnamed UK resident. YTL had acquired Wessex the month before pipping Royal Bank of Scotland whom Skellett says he favoured.

On 27 May the unidentified (Manx) company received an unsigned agreement dated 10 January between Skellett and a second unidentified man – in fact Martin Bushnell, a fixer hired by YTL who was a client of the Manx company. The £1.2m the police discovered was to be split between Skellett and Bushnell who was to receive £200,000 for facilitating the payment and forward the £1m.

But then the Manx company received an email which, according to Wills, said "there was a problem with Skellett receiving the advisory fee via the draft agreement as he is a director of Wessex Water and has to report to them in the accounts... Mr Skellett did not want his fellow directors or the rest of the company to know that he was to receive the money". Skellett admitted he had not told his co-directors of the YTL agreement at the time of his arrest but intended to do so at an upcoming board meeting.

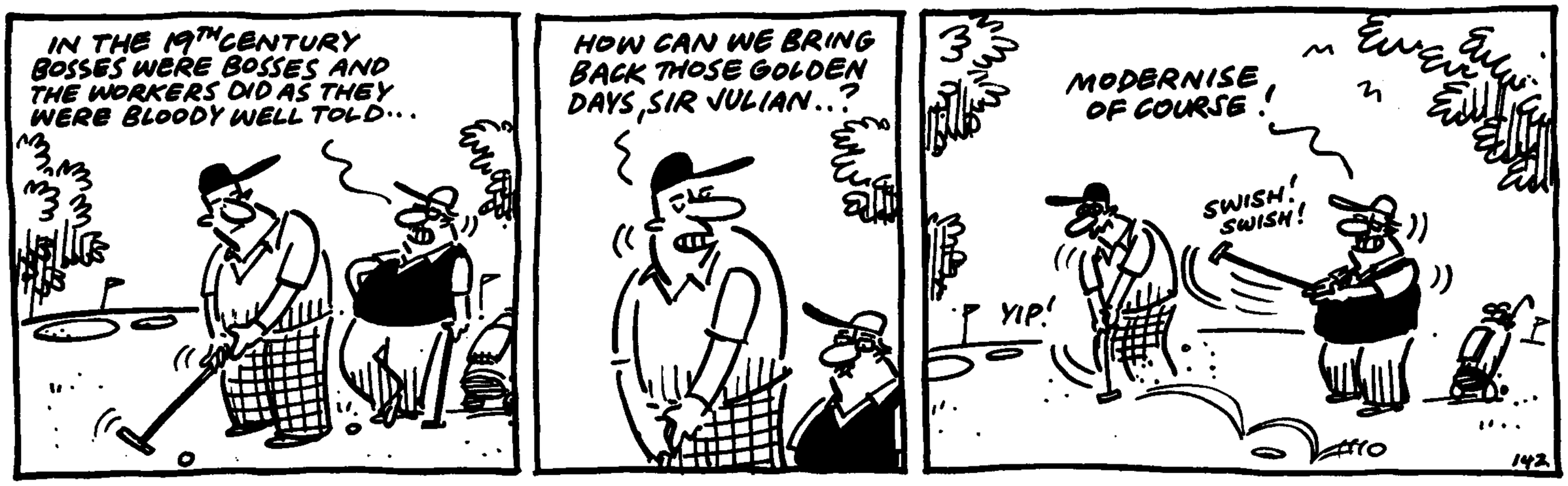
Wills said the company was asked – by whom he did not say – to redraft the agreement to show that the fees were for a fictitious transaction in south east Asia but refused. The £1.2m was returned. On 11 July £920,000 – £1m less Malaysian tax – was paid into Skellett's bank account at Barclays.

When the police searched Skellett's Bath home in August, Wills said they found a letter dated 8 July from YTL stating : "As discussed, we are agreeable at your request to make payment of the £1m fees payable under the consultancy agreement in one lump sum." Skellett had indicated that it was YTL which wanted to make the payment up-front.

Wills explained that when Bushnell – whom he did not identify – was arrested, his laptop was found to contain "attempts to purchase properties apparently in an effort to pay Mr Skellett in kind

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG

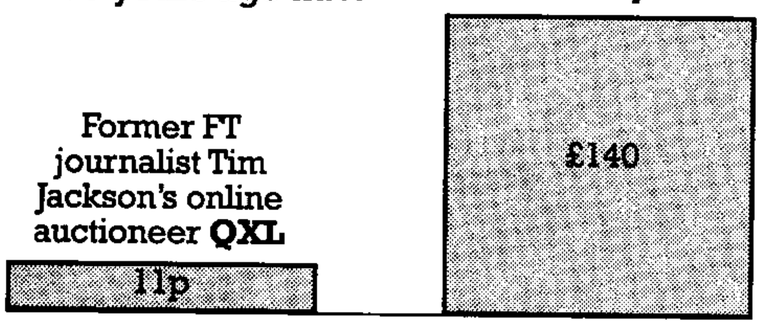

IN THE 19TH CENTURY BOSSES WERE BOSSES AND THE WORKERS DID AS THEY WERE BLOODY WELL TOLD...
HOW CAN WE BRING BACK THOSE GOLDEN DAYS, SIR JULIAN..?
MODERNISE OF COURSE!
SWISH! SWISH!
YIP!
AFFO
142

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

'Going, going... gone!'

Value of £100 invested three years ago in...



by providing him with a flat in London which could later be transferred into his name."

As Wills told the Commons: "The police inform me that in interviews Mr Skellett... made no mention of the attempts to make the payment to him via the... offshore route until he became aware the police had evidence of that... and did not volunteer any information about the attempt to reward him with the purchase of a property until the specific evidence was presented to him."

AT LONG last. After almost two and a half years Peter, aka Elizabeth, Young, the former Morgan Grenfell fund manager who cost investors more than £200m before he discovered his female alter ego, is due to face a finding of facts hearing to decide whether he or Elizabeth made all those bad investments.

The hearing is due to start on 4 June. If a special jury finds Young did what the Serious Farce Office says, then a medical supervision order can be made. Young has already been found unfit to be tried as a result of his mental state and history of self-mutilation. The SFO has to hope for even this limited result.

WHILE the liquidators of Imperial Consolidated continue to doggedly pursue Jared Brook and Lincoln Fraser over investors' missing £200m, it seems the SFO is cranking up its criminal investigation.

The aim is to bring a prosecution for investment fraud on the basis that investors' money was used for many purposes other than those stated in the documents sent out by IC. It is likely Brook and Fraser could be arrested and questioned within the next three months. Any charges, however, are unlikely before the end of the year at the earliest.

THE Venson Group, whose backers include Irish investor Dermot Desmond and builders John Laing, clearly believes in not forgetting old friends.

The fleet management group has made a £60,000 grant to the University of Portsmouth's Institute of Criminal Justice Studies to fund a research project into the private finance initiative (PFI) and public private partnerships (PPPs) in policing.

This project is in part under senior research fellow Dr Tom Williamson, former deputy chief constable of Nottinghamshire police. In 2001 Venson won a 25-year PFI contract with the Nottinghamshire force.

Venson may also soon be joined by Metropolitan police commander Graham James. Before he was seconded to the home office to deal with asylum seekers, James was in charge of transport at the Yard. Venson has a seven-year, £53m contract for maintaining the Met's fleet of cars and vans.

Clearance for James's possible move to Venson is understood to have been given by the Met. James is now back at Scotland Yard but could leave in August. He was due to face a sexual harassment employment tribunal case this week brought by a senior home office civil servant. However, the case has been settled for a reported £100,000. James denied the allegations.

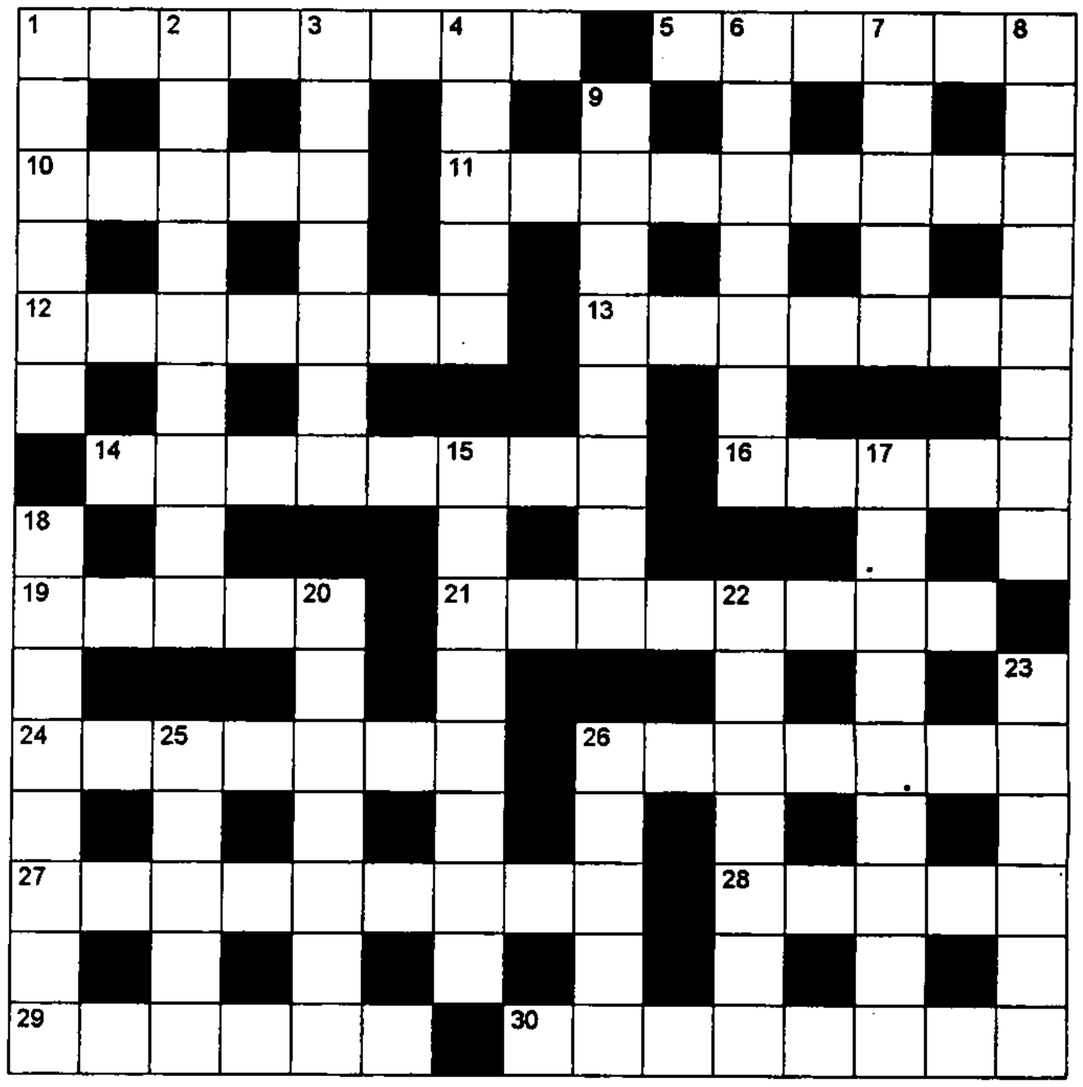
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 236

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 6 June 2003.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1/5 As a hack might be suspended for a grossly exaggerated report of a bloke down under (4,4,1,5)
10/28 Sex with topless dwarf having tendency to fart (5-5)
11 Mock force (United Nations) off gallivanting about (4,3,2)
12 Singer too pissed for a smoke (7)
13 Hangs around some opportunistic 'post-liberation' Iraqis when one replaces occupiers' leader (7)
14 Going down, clenching tip of tongue and humming (8)
16 Don't be an outsider guarding Blair's rear – and genital area (5)
19 About getting buggered: it used to be a danger 'below' (1-4)
21 They're produced by *Hooters, Pussy & Tossers*' predictions (8)
24 Take apart Bush's far from favourite organisation's team (7)
26 Old bag sees Southwark's premier gay rights activist get his wings clipped (7)
27 Male athlete's trick for keeping equipment safely in place (4,5)
28 See 10
29 Dishevelled but gives head boy no personal problem (6)
30 Mini 'Ground Force' trashy series starts after many a right bust-up (4,4)

DOWN

1 Old poet's ejaculation when on speed (6)
2 Prescott? Shit! (6,3)
3 Give up sex partner, getting depressed (3,4)
4 Some mistake MP Tony for orderly (5)
6 Blustering and removing board members (7)
7 Tory women stalwarts' crowning glory, if blue, lies in their insecurity (5)
8 Swearing about American outpouring (8)
9 Murdoch's business has fair pain, reportedly, at the top (8)
15 "N.O.R.W.I.C.H" scrawled on top of missive – creepy little bugger! (4-4)
17 Cooking unmanly? Oh, just what you'd expect from one of us (4,5)
18 Devious scheme to accommodate long-suffering character (3-2,3)
20 Goes through the motions as a lover? (7)
22 Stiff examination dashing past you (7)
23 Dolly's bust? It had a number of unfortunate names (6)
25 All right, the intelligence service's lost a flipping nutter (5)
26 Cop booze on Brenda (5)

Crossword 235 winner: MARY HOLMES

ACROSS: 1 Scoundrel 6 Dildo 9 Creep 10 Mandatory 11 Jugular 12 Nirvana 13 Knocking shop 18 Masturbation 21 Retakes 23 Catarrh 25 Superhero 26 Magic 27 Shred 28 Kofi Annan.

DOWN: 1 Sick joke 2 Overgrow 3 Nepal 4 Rembrandt 5 Lenin 6 Diarrhoea 7 Loofah 8 Oh yeah 14 Knackered 15 Struck off 16 Nitrogen 17 In the can 19 Crisis 20 Stupor 22 Sneak 24 Tampa.

Yobs
HUSBAND
Who are you staring at yer ugly bastard.. do you want a smack?!
OK Mick... time to go home.. you've had enough
Bollocks.. I'm sober
Then why've you just threatened yourself in the mirror?
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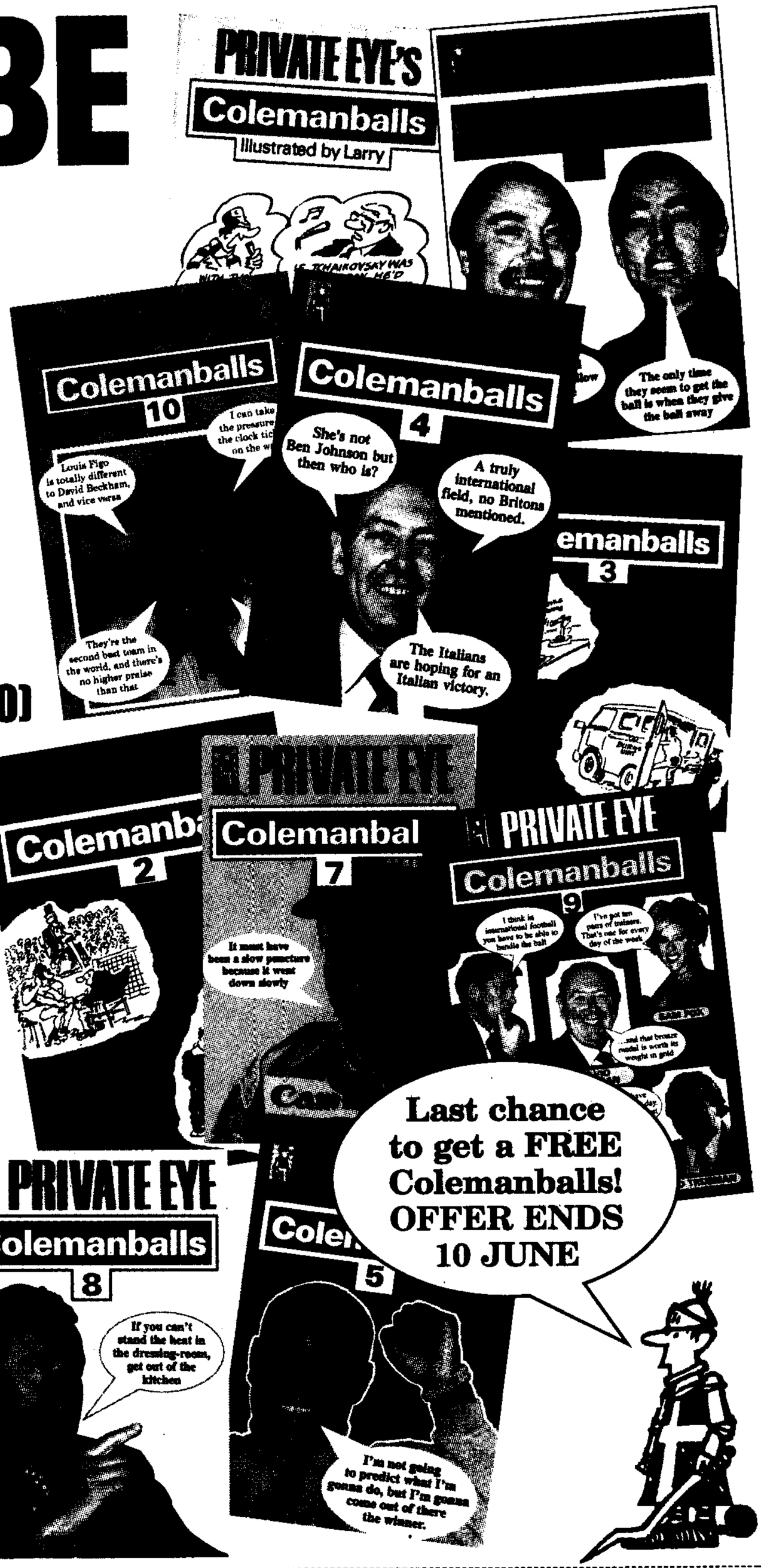
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It must have been a slow puncture because it went down slowly
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I think in international football you have to be able to handle the ball
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If you can't stand the heat in the dressing-room, get out of the kitchen
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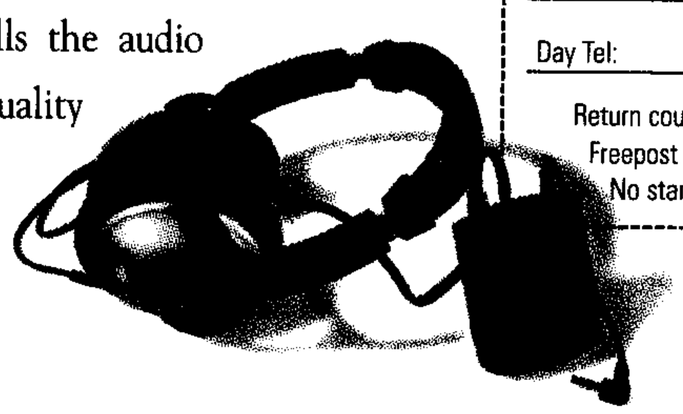

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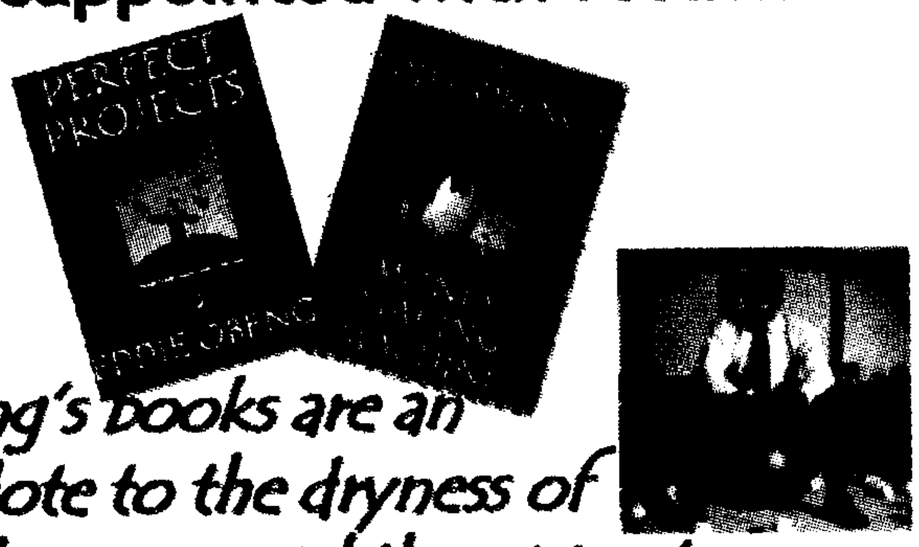

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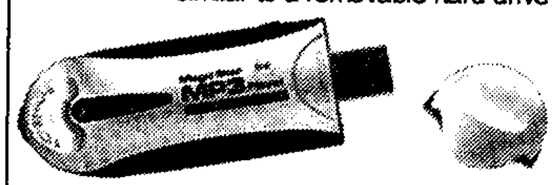

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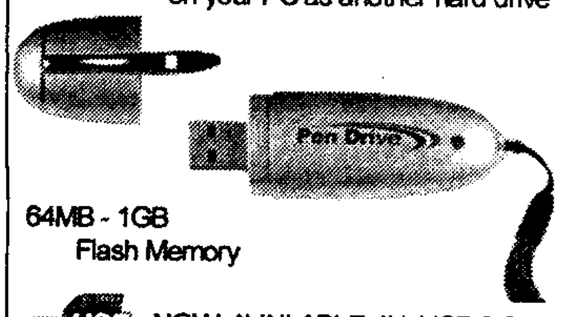

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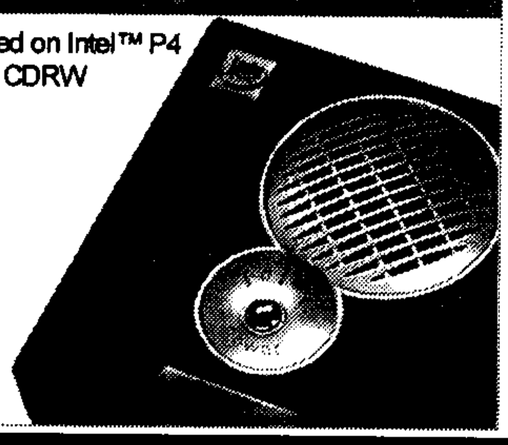

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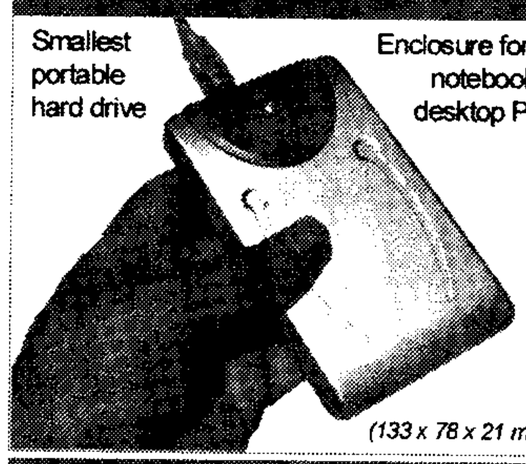

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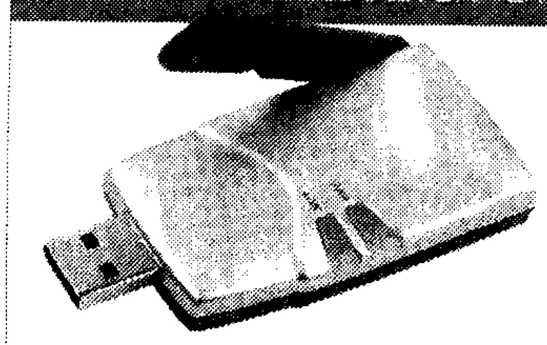

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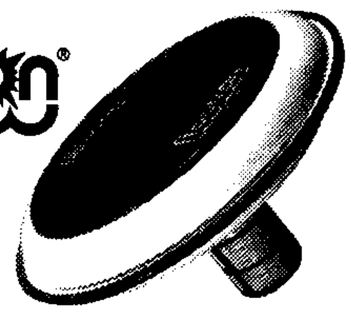

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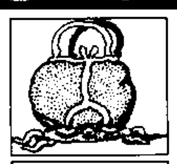

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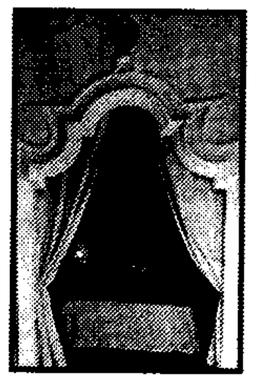

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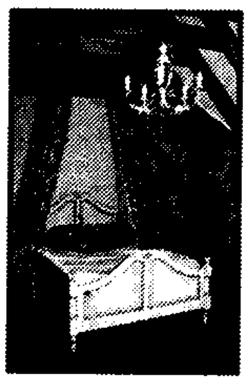

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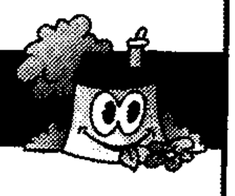

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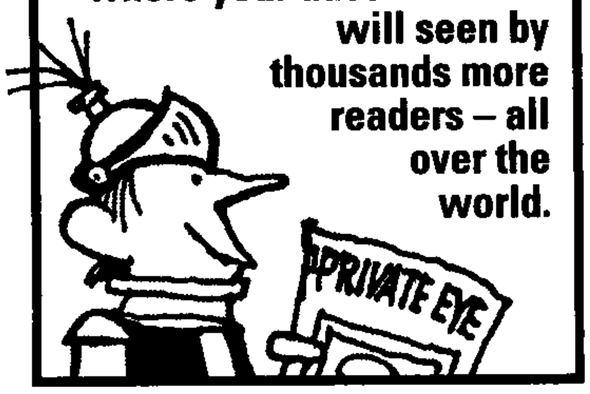

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